

The Daytona 500

BY A NOSE: THE GREATEST
GREAT AMERICAN RACE EVER

P. 6



February 29, 2016
SI.COM

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CONOR MCGREGOR

PUTS THE FIGHT
IN FIGHTING IRISH ...
AND THE FEAR IN
THE REST OF THE UFC

By L. Jon Wertheim P. 30



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Conor McGregor

A series of wins have made the brash pride of Ireland the UFC's latest star

By L. Jon Wertheim

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Tennessee

A 20-year-old scandal has sparked scrutiny of deeper problems in the athletic department

By Greg Bishop, Thayer Evans and Ben Baskin

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The long-dormant Raiders, Jaguars and Bucs are building with young arms

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Sidney Crosby

As the Penguins' captain enters hockey middle age, just who is Sid the Kid?

By Michael Farber

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Indentured

How two football players tried to unionize college athletes, rattling the NCAA

By Joe Nocera and Ben Strauss

Photograph by
Timothy J. Gonzalez/AP

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Gary Payton II

He has followed in his dad's footsteps to Oregon State. Will he too be Pac-12 player of the year?

By Dan Greene

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At times, fame can be a real kick

ON THE COVER:

Deirdre Brennan/Redux for Sports Illustrated (McGregor); Sarah Crabill/NASCAR/Getty Images (Daytona)

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FOR FEB. 29, 2016

Combine Effort

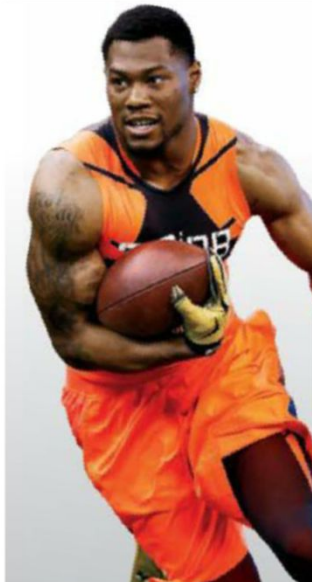
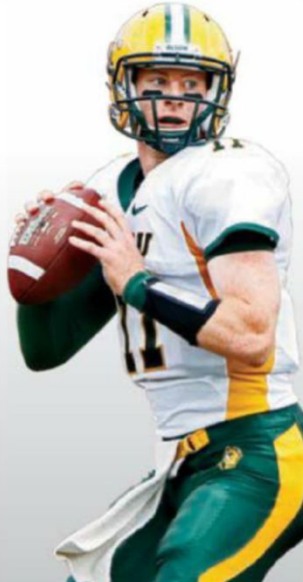
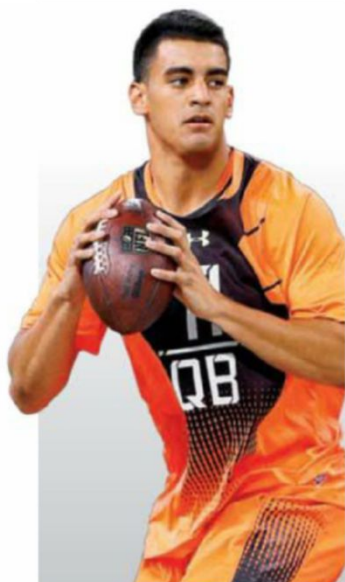
At last year's NFL Scouting Combine, Oregon quarterback **Marcus Mariota** wowed scouts with his arm and legs [a 40-yard dash time of 4.52], while Michigan State's **Jeremy Langford** was the only running back to dip below 4.5 seconds [4.42]. Who will be this year's top performers? Will North Dakota State's **Carson Wentz** secure his spot as the No. 1 QB on the board? Can Ohio State running back **Ezekiel Elliott** raise his draft stock? Go to **SI.com/nfl** for a complete breakdown of this year's combine, which will be held from Feb. 23 through Feb. 29 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

MARCUS MARIOTA

CARSON WENTZ

JEREMY LANGFORD

EZEKIEL ELLIOTT



SI.COM's

Top Stories



1 Miller High Life

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including a feature on how Broncos linebacker **Von Miller** is reaping the benefits of his Super Bowl MVP honors—go to **SI.com/topstories**

2 Biggest Losers

A look at the NBA trade deadline's biggest movers, shakers and busts

3 10 Years of Goodell

Reflecting on the policies that have defined the last decade under the NFL commissioner

4 Scout's Honor

Coaches from college basketball's top conferences evaluate their opponents

5 True Blue

Behind the scenes with Michigan's top recruit, defensive lineman Rashan Gary from Plainfield, N.J.

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Digital Bonus

Reversal of Fortune

From the SI Vault: Feb. 18, 2002

Missouri guard **Kareem Rush** is in the spotlight that once shone on his older brother, JaRon, whose poor decisions may have cost him an NBA career

By Grant Wahl



To read this and other stories from the *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* archives, go to **SI.com/vault**



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of
3Leading
Off

DAYTONA 500

As Good—and
As Close—
As It Gets

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

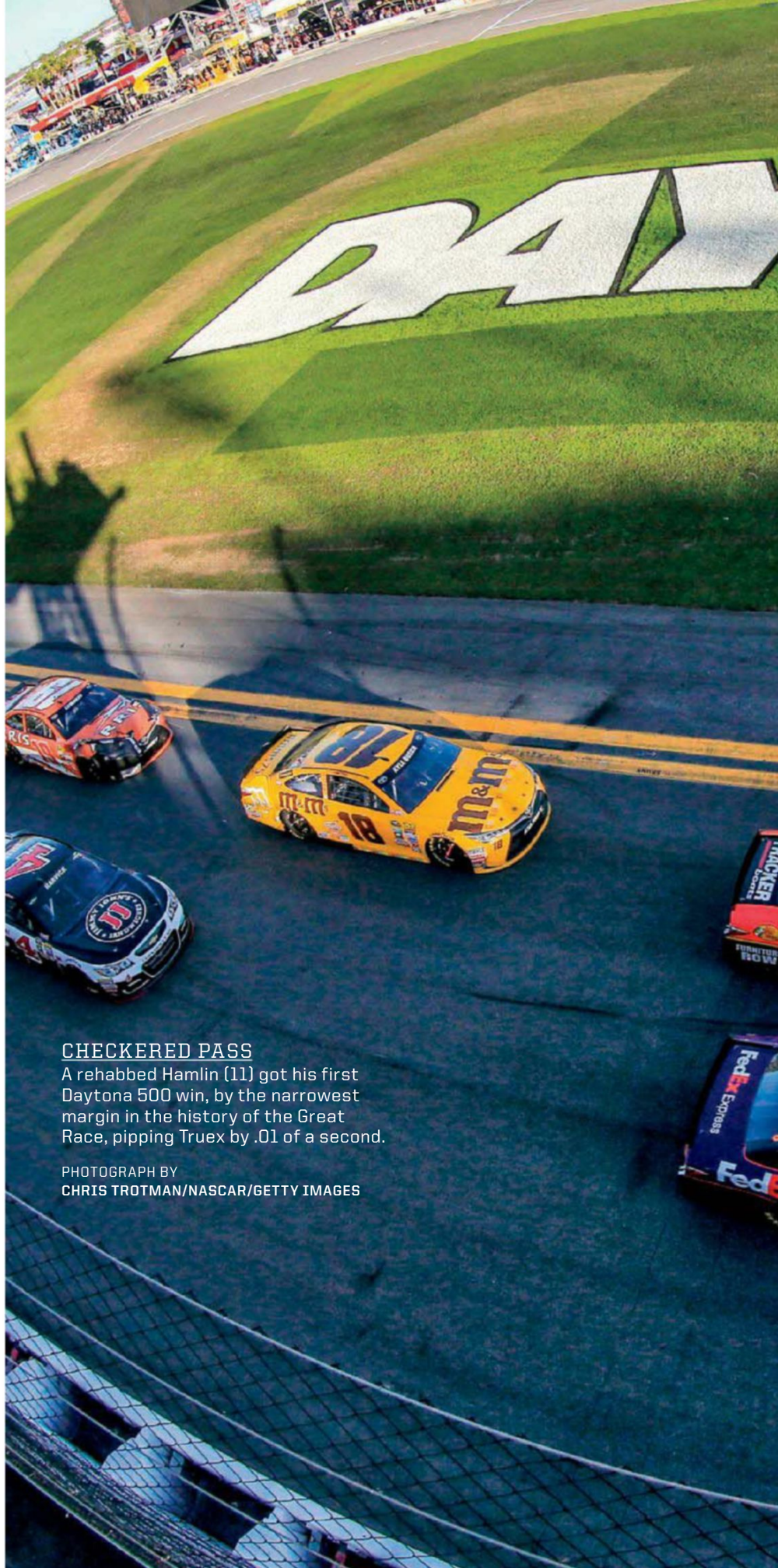
■ Denny Hamlin doesn't like to exercise. Sure, he'll do it—but only because staying fit is part of the job of a NASCAR driver. He's certainly no Jimmie Johnson, the six-time Sprint Cup champion who competes in triathlons. "I'll never be the guy who puts on running shoes and goes and does five miles," says the 35-year-old Hamlin, who does his racing while seated for Joe Gibbs's team. "But put a ball in my hand, make it competitive, and I can go all day."

So he plays basketball. A lot of basketball. He had a full-length court built at his Cornelius, N.C., home and competes in a pickup league. And he plays hard. "I run around like I'm actually good at defense," he says. "But I'm a good team player."

His defensive zeal got the better of him in September when, during a pickup game, a ballhandler's move buckled him and sent him to the ground clutching his right knee. He had torn his anterior cruciate ligament.

This was less than two weeks before the start of the Chase, for which Hamlin had qualified (for the ninth time in his 11-year Cup career) by winning in March at Martinsville. An ACL tear usually shelves an athlete for months.

But Hamlin decided to race through it—no surprise, given his threshold for pain. A month before the 2010 season he had torn his *left* ACL playing hoops and held off on having surgery until after his sixth

CHECKERED PASS

A rehabbed Hamlin (11) got his first Daytona 500 win, by the narrowest margin in the history of the Great Race, pipping Truex by .01 of a second.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CHRIS TROTMAN/NASCAR/GETTY IMAGES



race. When Hamlin won the opening race of the '15 Chase, it seemed as if the bum right knee wouldn't hold him back. And it didn't. Hamlin's '15 playoff run ended in the Contender Round, and it was a heroic effort. If not for his teammate Kyle Busch, who rallied to win the championship after a February accident at Daytona that busted both his legs, Hamlin would've been heralded as the toughest SOB on the Cup Series.

Hamlin finally went under the knife at the end of November. Afterward he was laid up for five weeks. The rehab that followed, he says, "was much tougher on me than the first one," and took away from his preparation for this season.

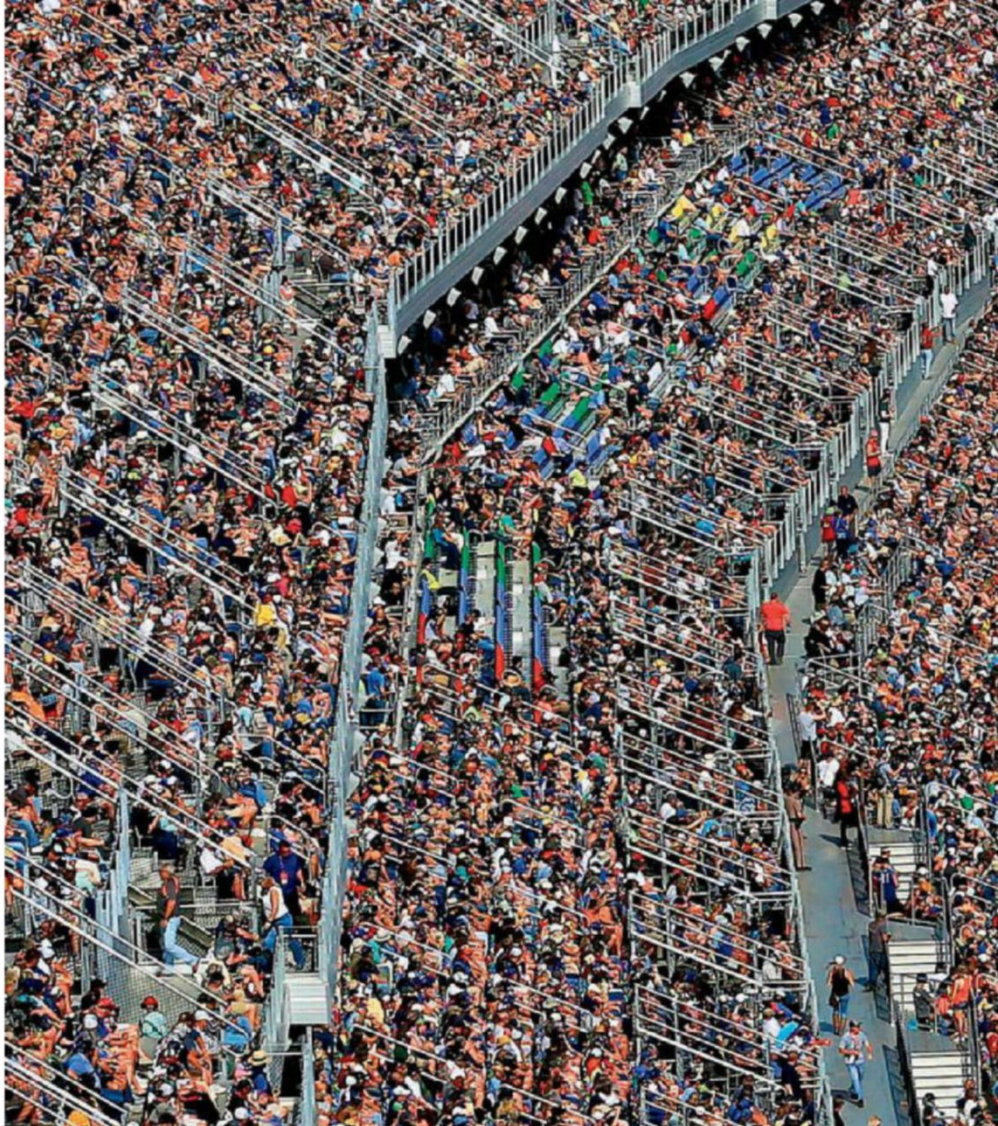
He arrived stiff-legged at Daytona but proceeded to win the Sprint Unlimited race on Feb. 13 (a nonpoints exhibition for 25 top drivers) and light up the speed charts in practice. It was a familiar routine for Hamlin, a three-time Unlimited winner who'd finished in the top five in his last two starts in the Great American Race. His best shot at breaking into the Winner's Circle at Daytona this year would be to stick with his equally quick Toyota teammates: Busch, Matt Kenseth, Carl Edwards and Furniture Row Racing's Martin Truex Jr.

On Sunday, the five Toyotas

FINISHING TOUCH

Fans at the renovated Speedway were treated to a wild finish, as Hamlin (11) squeezed past teammate Kenseth (20) on the final turn, sending Kenseth to the wall and setting up a dash to the line with Truex (78).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CHRIS TROTMAN/NASCAR/
GETTY IMAGES (TOP)
SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES





dominated, leading 156 of the 200 laps. Hamlin, after a flubbed green-flag pit stop dropped him out of the lead into seventh with 40 laps to go, had resigned himself to staying on the bottom groove of the track for Kenseth, a two-time 500 winner who, with five laps to go, seemed destined to grab the checkered flag once again.

When Kevin Harvick made a charge on the top groove in his Stewart-Haas Chevy, Hamlin swung high to block him and wound up getting shoved so hard that he was soon closing on Kenseth. Seeing that, Kenseth moved up to block Hamlin but lost control, slewing sideways as the field swept past. (He would avoid wrecking, but fell all the way back to 14th at the finish.) By the final turn Hamlin was right off Truex's passenger-side door, which he banged and banged again at nearly 200 mph in a bid to siphon momentum. Even after crossing the finish line Hamlin wasn't sure his strategy had made a difference. But it had, giving him the victory by .01 of a second, the closest finish in the race's 58-year history.

It took a few TV replays for Hamlin to appreciate what he had done: won Toyota's first 500 in the manufacturer's 11 tries, snapped Joe Gibbs Racing's 22-year losing streak in the race, and booked a spot in the 2016 Chase. And when the immensity of the moment finally washed over him, he buckled again—but there was no pain this time.

WITHIN REACH

Hamlin took his Daytona success to new heights on Sunday, giving Joe Gibbs Racing its first Daytona victory in 23 years.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
CHUCK BURTON/AP





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INBOX

FOR FEB. 8, 2016

I had no idea that after his storied NHL career, **Jeremy Roenick** (*bottom, near right*) became the “Face of the Franchise” quarterback on your cover. What can you say? The guy had talent.

AJ Loprete, Concord, Mass.

At first glance, I really thought **Edward Snowden** (*middle*) was on the cover.

Rachel Eckstein
Medford, Ore.

Is it just me or does the composite look like former QB **Jeff George** (*far right*)?

Jim Surabian
Palm Desert, Calif.



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SCORECARD

I enjoyed Jacob Feldman's essay on older athletes having superb winter seasons, but I was bummed not to see **Kelly Slater**, 44, mentioned. He won the Volcom Pipe Pro on Feb. 2, defeating 20-year-old Makai McNamara, who wasn't even born when Slater won the first of his 11 world titles.

David Rosenblum
Jacksonville Beach, Fla.



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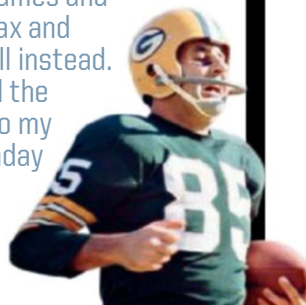


John Iacono's picture of Tom Brady tossing a pass from a “perfect pocket” was indeed stellar (**LEADING OFF**). But as for Peter King's suggestion that it was textbook blocking, I'm not sure. I see a lot of holding, grabbing and pushing.

Bill Taglia, Southington, Conn.

I loved Tim Layden's piece about Packers wideout **Max McGee** (*Print the Legend*), especially his references to McGee's career as Green Bay's radio broadcaster. It reminded me of the days when my family muted the television for Packers games and listened to Max and Jim Irwin's call instead. They provided the sound track to my childhood Sunday afternoons.

Eric Hanson
Alexandria, Va.



I couldn't help but notice in your story about **Super Bowl** advertising (*George Orwell, Budway Joe and Ling Ling the Impolitic Panda*), that the three most recent landmark ads were linked to the Redskins' last three Super Bowl appearances: the Apple spot in 1984, the Bud Bowl inspired by '88, and Reebok's Dan and Dave ads in '92. If that pattern continues, we may be in for a long drought of Super Bowl ad milestones.

Mike Gallagher
McLean, Va.

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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

Jazz Aficionados

In his father's final days, the author, who wrote a best-selling memoir about his family, found harmony in the travails of an NBA team

BY DAN MARSHALL

MY DAD, BOB, dreamed of qualifying for the Boston Marathon, and in October 2006 at the St. George (Utah) Marathon he did, with a time of 3:34:56. Later that month, at age 53, he was diagnosed with ALS.

Despite the crushing news, my dad decided he'd still run Boston. He finished the race—arms linked with those of his trusty running pals—in 6:12:57, more than 2½ hours slower than his time at St. George only seven months earlier.

After celebrating his amazing accomplishment, we went back to our room at the Hyatt. My dad was so exhausted that he couldn't lift his arms. They hung at his side like broken tree branches. He was sweaty and salty. He needed a shower. That led to a situation that a son only imagines in a nightmare: I had to bathe my dad.

As I began to undress him in the hotel bathroom, he said, "I'm sorry about this."

"It's O.K.," I said. He had become so skinny: Each rib was outlined through his sagging skin; his shoulder blades were as sharp as volcanic rocks. The disease was ruining him.

As I began to wash him, he could've talked about how sad he was that this would be his last marathon or about how scared he was to face this relentless disease. But instead he said, "So, do you think the Jazz will make the playoffs this year?"

And then we spent the rest of the bath discussing the playoff prognosis for the Utah Jazz.

The team was a staple of my childhood. I was lucky enough to grow up during the John Stockton–Karl Malone era, and we had season tickets. My dad was a busy man, running his own newspaper business

and taking care of my mom, Debi, who was battling Stage IV non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, but we'd always find time to sneak away to the Delta Center.

My dad would buy us popcorn, and when I was of age, he added beer. It was our activity, the time we had together to talk not only about the intricacies of NBA basketball but also about life. We'd discuss my mom's illness, which college to attend and how I could get girls in Utah to like me even though I wasn't a Mormon.

As the ALS progressed, my dad had to go on a respirator. The dependable legs that had propelled him through six marathons stopped working, and he was confined to a hospital bed.

But we still caught every Jazz game on TV. He couldn't high-five any more, so I'd pull a chair up next to his bed and we'd do foot high-fives whenever



something good happened. "Maybe I should jam some beer and popcorn into your feeding tube," I'd joke.

The games were a break from a bleak situation—a few hours of respite from the urinals, diapers, wheelchairs, feeding tubes and breathing machines. And on March 8, 2008, we got to attend a game in person again. One of our neighbors gave our family—including my brother and three sisters—tickets to a luxury suite. My dad's respirator dangled from the back of his 450-pound wheelchair as we watched Utah center Mehmet Okur catch fire, nailing six three-pointers as the Jazz beat

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW DEGRAFF



the Nuggets 132-105. Being back on our old stomping grounds made it seem like things might go back to how they were before the ALS storm hit.

It was the last game my dad saw in person. The Jazz made the playoffs that year. I was hoping they'd go on some crazy championship run so my dad could see them win the Larry O'Brien Trophy, but all the foot high-fives in the world couldn't slow down the Kobe-led Lakers. They eliminated the Jazz in six games in the second round.

My dad died a few months later, after he elected to discontinue use of the respirator. Basketball

is a silly game—a bunch of giants tossing a little orange ball through a metal hoop—but I had seen its power. Sports give us a medium to spend time together and help us become closer to the ones we love.

I still watch most Jazz games. Every season my mom—who fought off the cancer—and I go to at least one game together. If the Jazz win a championship in my lifetime, I will probably cry, hopefully with my mom at my side. And it won't be out of happiness for Gordon Hayward.

Dan Marshall's memoir HOME IS BURNING was published in October 2015.

GO FIGURE

565



Consecutive weeks that the **Tennessee Lady Volunteers** were ranked in the AP top 25, a streak that ended on Monday. Tennessee entered last week at No. 24 but lost 57-56 to LSU on Sunday to fall to 16-11. The Lady Vols had been ranked in every poll since Feb. 17, 1985.

5-2



The score of four consecutive losses for the **Canucks** from Feb. 13 to Feb. 19, making them the first NHL team to drop four straight games by that score. The streak ended on Sunday when Vancouver beat the Avalanche 5-1.

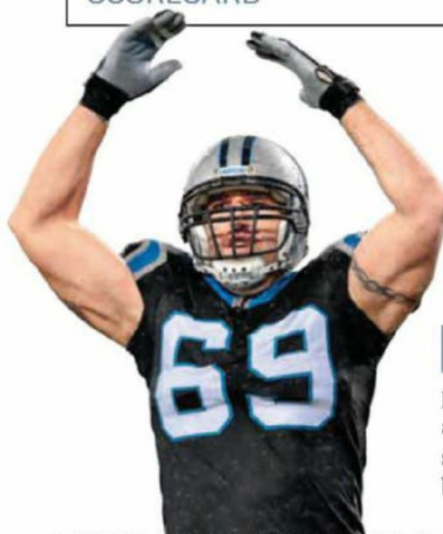
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Wins by the eight seeded players at the WTA's Dubai Duty Free tournament last week. There were 28 players in the field: seeds 1 to 4 received byes into the round of 16, in which all lost; seeds 5 through 8 lost in the round of 32. The tournament was won by Sara Errani, who is ranked 17th in the world.

59

Points scored by the Pelicans' **Anthony Davis**, in New Orleans's 111-106 win over the Pistons on Sunday at The Palace in Auburn Hills, Mich. Davis, who added 20 rebounds, set a franchise record for most points in a game and a high for the NBA this season.



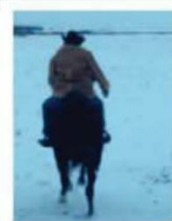


Exit Strategies

Athletes are saying so long in style

ON FEB. 18, PANTHERS defensive end Jared Allen announced his retirement after 12 years in the NFL by posting a video on Twitter. In it, he thanked fans while sitting on a horse before riding off into more of a cloudy evening than a sunset, but the idea was the same. It was the latest in what has become a trend of elaborate straight-to-the-fans athlete farewells.

—Shannon Lane



Happening Bye

After getting bucked by the Broncos, Allen mounted up.



MARSHAWN LYNCH

WHEN: Feb. 7, 2016

HOW: During the fourth quarter of Super Bowl 50 the Seattle running back tweeted a photo of a pair of cleats hanging over a phone wire accompanied by a "peace out" emoji. After nine years, he hung 'em up.



JUSTIN TUCK

WHEN: Feb. 1, 2016

HOW: The 11-year veteran defensive end posted on Facebook a montage of his greatest moments—from sacking Tom Brady in two Super Bowls to his Subway ads, all set to Coldplay's "A Sky Full of Stars."



KOBE BRYANT

WHEN: Nov. 29, 2015

HOW: After 20 seasons he wrote a love letter to the game that was posted online. Ho hum. But attendees at that night's tilt against the Pacers got hard copies of the letter, which were selling on eBay for hundreds of dollars within hours.



DAVID ORTIZ

WHEN: Nov. 18, 2015

HOW: The Red Sox big man spoke directly to the camera in a solemn, artsy video saying that 2016 would be his 20th and final season. In perhaps a nod to his future, he was credited as executive producer.



ANTHONY ADAMS

WHEN: March 23, 2013

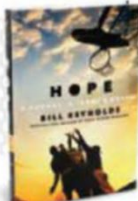
HOW: After nine years with the 49ers and Bears the little-known DT produced a video in which he planned an elaborate announcement ceremony, only to end up with a few friends at a White Castle, where he fills out a job application.



NFL Confidential

Johnny Anonymous

An unnamed backup dishes on life in the league, spews clichés and seems set to prove one true: Footballers are not smart. #northdallas20



Hope

Bill Reynolds

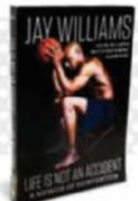
This gut-wrenching and inspirational tale of the hoops team at Hope High in Providence is about much more than sports. #coach



The Fall Line

Nathaniel Vinton

A year with Lindsey Bode, et al., brings the intricacies of World Cup skiing to life. More impressive, it compels readers to care. #carve



Life Is Not an Accident

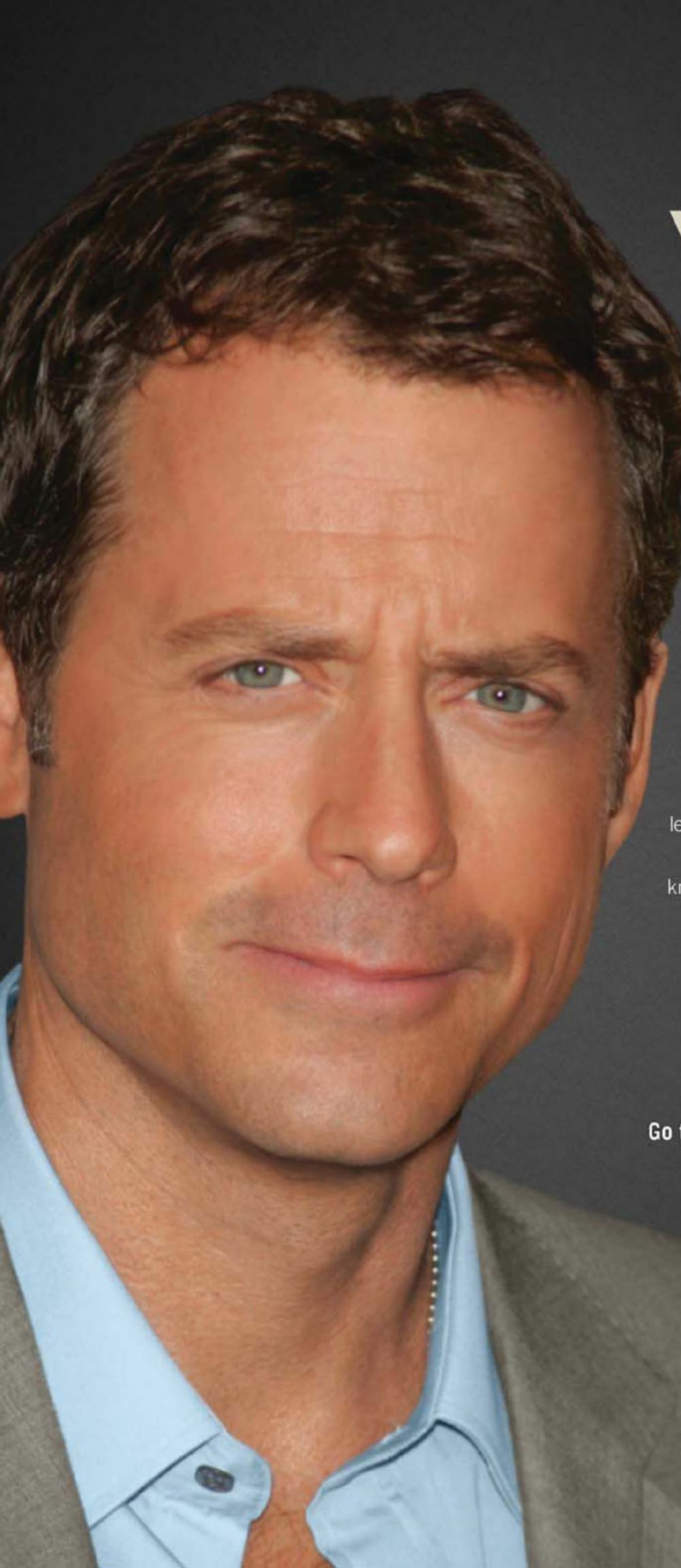
Jay Williams

Duke star's career-ending crash opens book that alternates filler with insider gossip on recruiting, women, drugs and self-hate. #toughbreak



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Poison Ink

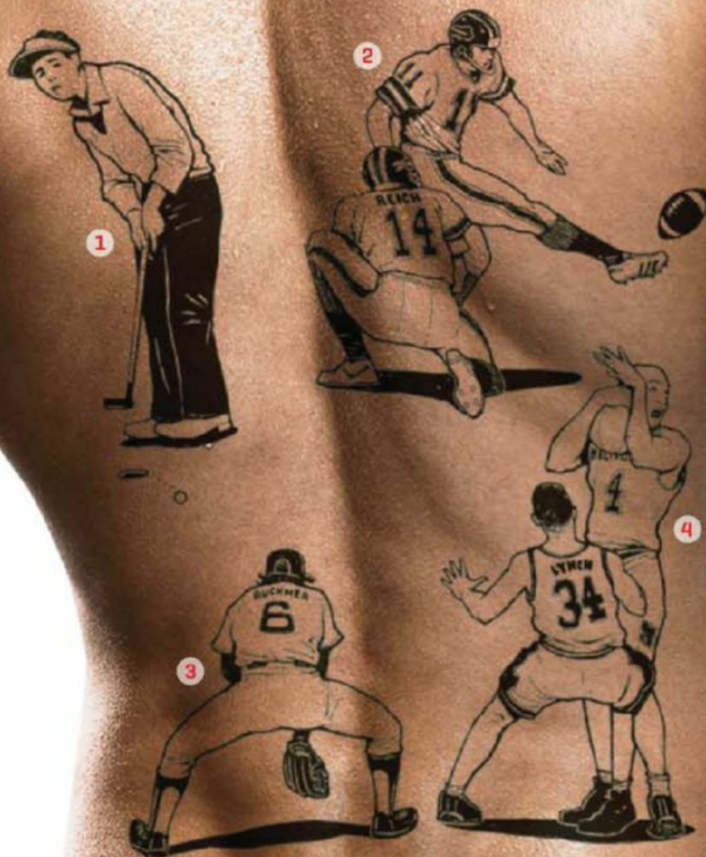
LAST WEEK FORMER Penn State receiver Allen Robinson (now with the Jags) debuted a tat showing a key catch he made in a 43–40 four-OT win over Michigan in 2013. As much as it celebrated Robinson's heroics, the image singled out the DB he beat, the Wolverines' Channing Stribling, introducing the sports troll tattoo. Here are a few others that could follow.

1. Tattooeee: Nick Faldo
Tattoo: Scott Hoch missing a two-footer that would have won the 1989 Masters.

2. Tattooeee: Bill Parcells
Tattoo: Scott Norwood going wide right in Super Bowl XXV.

3. Tattooeee: Mookie Wilson
Tattoo: Bill Buckner booting a grounder in Game 6 of the '86 Series.

4. Tattooeee: George Lynch
Tattoo: Chris Webber calling a TO he didn't have to end the '93 NCAA title game.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Australian cricket star Shane Warne, appearing on *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*, put his head in a box of snakes and was immediately bitten in the face by a non-poisonous anaconda.

Bubba Watson

The long hitter won the L.A. Open. For him, bombing in Hollywood is a résumé-builder.



HOT ▲
NOT ▼



Frank Kaminsky

The Hornets' rook challenged the Knicks' Kristaps Porzingis to a dance-off. Should they nae nae? No no.

THEY SAID IT

"HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE HIS DAGGUM PANTS ON THE RIGHT WAY."

Roy Williams

UNC coach questioning the sagacity of ESPN's Doug Gottlieb, who once wore his shorts backward while playing for Oklahoma State, after Gottlieb said that Williams would retire after the season.





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Solo Effort

The goalkeeper's muscles are getting a workout

A DIVING SAVE in soccer is a picture-perfect moment: a gymnastic display of quick reflexes, a gutsy leap with outstretched arms and unfurled fingers. For U.S. women's national team goalkeeper Hope Solo, preparing for that instant begins not on a grassy surface but on a reflective one.

"I put tape on a mirror, and I look and make sure that my head and chest are always still when I'm moving," says the 34-year-old Solo. "You don't want to be going up and down, because either you can't see the ball or you'll be too late. It's about being steady and balanced."

Since 2013, Solo has worked with Ben

Dragavon, who doubles as the goalkeeper coach and the head strength-and-conditioning coach for Solo's Seattle Reign FC of the National Women's Soccer League. He's also a certified specialist in Muscle Activation Technique (MAT), which seeks to optimize muscle contraction to provide stability and increase range of motion. Solo says the technique has helped her better control her center of gravity.

"You're trying to learn your body from the inside out," she says. "In the gym I work on movement that gets me to the ball faster."

Workouts vary based on Dragavon's daily evaluations of Solo's range of motion in her feet, hips,

lower back, shoulders and spine. If he detects the slightest inefficiency in movement, he'll change a drill or an exercise.

"She was having issues loading one leg more than another," says Dragavon. "When she was shuffling across the goal, her center of mass would shift over to one leg a little more than the other, and it affected her balance slightly. As a goalkeeper she needs to be able to change direction on the fly. So it's not good if her balance is all on one leg."

Though the national team coaches don't incorporate MAT into Solo's workouts, she says she'll keep using it as she prepares for the Olympics in Rio this August.

"You have to find new ways to train and new ways to look at your game," Solo says. "That's what keeps me wanting to continue to grow."

—Jamie Lisanti

EDGE

HIP WORKOUT: USE MAT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Because Hope Solo is so highly skilled and her muscles so well trained, Ben Dragavon has to watch slow motion film of her to find the slightest hitch in her movements. But even if you're not an elite athlete like Solo, you can still use MAT exercises to activate minor muscle groups and increase range of motion during a workout.



To help improve hip flexion, start with your feet shoulder-width apart. Lift your left leg by squeezing your stomach muscles and contracting the right gluteus muscle. This creates a strong anchor for the hip flexors, Dragavon says. Maintain alignment in the hips and hold for 30 seconds to one minute. Repeat with the opposite leg.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/edge

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SPORTS PERFORMANCE

testing can be barbaric. Technicians push athletes to their limits and probe and prod them as they exercise. The most meaningful results come from looking inside the athletes. Sometimes researchers use scanners, but sometimes they take blood—lots of it.

In lactate-threshold testing, which determines the maximum exercise level an athlete can sustain, techs draw blood repeatedly while an athlete progressively increases his or her intensity until the point of failure. “People who do lactate [testing] don’t go back to do it frequently,” says BSX Athletics president Dustin Freckleton.

To make the process less painful, Freckleton and his staff have developed the BSXinsight, a wearable

device that measures the lactic threshold based on the color of red blood cells—they’re bright red when carrying oxygen, dark red when not. Worn inside a compression sleeve over the calf, the BSXinsight shines infrared light through the skin, then analyzes the color reflected back. The data determines the muscle tissue’s oxygen saturation, or SmO_2 .

“Muscle oxygenation is the linchpin to the energy-producing systems,” says Freckleton. Muscles obtain most of their energy aerobically, i.e., with oxygen. Reduce the oxygen available and muscles begin to switch to anaerobic processes, which produce lactic acid as a by-product. As lactic acid builds up, muscles begin to ache and fatigue, and eventually an athlete has to back off the intensity or even stop. Proper training

can lead to cardiovascular adaptations that increase the body’s ability to deliver oxygen to muscles and flush out lactate, delaying the onset of fatigue. Because a decrease in SmO_2 increases lactic acid production, BSXinsight can relate the two quantities, and measure lactate indirectly, without a needle.

The BSXinsight (which comes in three models that range between \$300 and \$420) also provides a direct value for SmO_2 , a figure that might be more important than the lactate threshold. Live feedback of muscle oxygenation could be used to track individual muscle engagement at any time, determine the ideal length of intervals between exercise repetitions or improve split times on a cycling route by showing where fatigue sets in. All without spilling a drop of blood. —Tom Taylor

+ Smart Socks

A spilled

cappuccino was all the inspiration Mario Esposito needed. Five years ago, as hot coffee seeped into his socks, he hit upon a way to turn ordinary fabric into a pressure sensor and ordinary socks into smart socks.

In 2011, Esposito, who works at Google, cofounded Sensoria, which produces socks that have two sensors on the forefoot and one on the heel to measure how each foot applies pressure to the ground. This information is relayed along silver fibers to magnetic studs at the top of the sock, where a detachable anklet records the data.

Sensoria’s socks (\$199 for two pairs) do more than record activity. Runners can uncover problems with their stride and test shoes, extracting information about how a shoe affects their foot as it strikes the ground. —T.T.



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Sports Illustrated
HIGH SCHOOL
ATHLETE OF THE MONTH

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■ **SOPHIA FORESTA**, a junior at Bingham High in South Jordan, Utah, is a two-time national BMX champion with her sights set on Olympic gold in Tokyo in 2020. Her latest title came in November when she won the girls' 15-to-16 age group at Grand Nationals in Tulsa, clinching the girls' National No. 1 Amateur Cup with the most cumulative points among all ages during 2015. Sophia maintains a 3.91 GPA and takes American Sign Language, which she was inspired to try after meeting deaf riders last year at a weekly clinic she helps coach at her local track. "People often go the easy route at school and just take Spanish, but I think that [the deaf community] appreciates that we're trying to really understand and get into their world and their culture," Sophia says. For more on Sophia's story visit, SI.com/HSathlete



Claire Adams | *Carmel, Ind.* | *Swimming*

Claire, a senior at Carmel High, set an Indiana record with a 51.65 in the 100-yard backstroke at the state championship preliminaries, then won the final in 52.39. She also took the 100 free [48.83] to lead the Greyhounds to their 30th straight state championship, a national record in any sport. Claire finished with a state-record 16 individual and relay titles.



Zach Mandry | *Solon, Ohio* | *Hockey*

Zach, a senior forward and captain at Solon High, scored twice in a 7-2 win over Western Reserve Academy of Hudson to set the state record with 195 career goals. Through Sunday he had extended it to 219 with 79 goals this season—along with 37 assists. Zach also shot a school-record three-under 67 to win the Division I sectional golf title in October.



Anna Cockrell | *Waxhaw, N.C.* | *Indoor Track and Field*

Anna, a senior at Providence Day School in Charlotte, finished fifth in the 60-meter hurdles at the Camel City Invitational in Winston-Salem with the top high school time this season [8.24]. She also has the season's best time in the 55-meter hurdles [7.70]. Last August, Anna took gold in the 400 hurdles [57.10] at the junior Pan American championships.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited By **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**



Ty Sabin | *New Berlin, Wis.* | *Basketball*

Sabin, a 6' 2" junior guard at Division III Ripon [Wis.] College, set school records with 51 points and 11 three-pointers, including the decisive trey at the buzzer, in a 78-77 OT win over Cornell [Iowa]. His 11 threes are tied for second most in D-III this season. At week's end Sabin led the Midwest Conference with 26.5 points per game.



Jessica Kovatch | *Phillipsburg, N.J.* | *Basketball*

Kovatch, a 5' 9" freshman guard at St. Francis University in Loretto, Pa., scored a team-high 24 points in an 87-74 win over Wagner two days after racking up 18 points in a 73-64 victory over Mount Saint Mary's. Through Sunday she led all Division I NCAA freshmen in scoring [22.5 points per game] and in three-pointers [89].



Sreeram Venkatarao | *Mason, Ohio* | *Rubik's Cube*

Sreeram, a junior at William Mason High, broke a North American record, solving a 3 x 3 Rubik's cube while blindfolded in 25.19 seconds at a World Cube Association event in Dixon, Ill. [His time included the nine seconds he needed to memorize the cube.] Sreeram's average for three completed puzzles [26.73] also set a continental mark.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow [@SI_Faces](https://twitter.com/SI_Faces) on Twitter.

A photograph taken from inside a vehicle, looking out through a large open hatch. Four Marines in full combat gear, including helmets and large backpacks, are walking away from the vehicle onto a sandy, desert landscape. The lead Marine is in the center, slightly to the left, with his back to the camera. Two other Marines are to his right, and one is further back on the left. The terrain is flat and arid, with a hazy horizon under a bright sky. The interior of the vehicle is dark, with some equipment visible on the left and right sides of the hatch.

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JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: What was your game plan for the dunk contest?

AARON GORDON: My game plan was to do four dunks that had never been done before in the contest. I came out and executed them perfectly.

DP: If you had voted, would Zach have gotten your vote?

AG: No, Zach would not have. [Laughs.] If I was a little kid watching and I saw the mascot come out and someone jump over him the way I did, I would have given my vote to him.

DP: If you had one more dunk, what would you have done?

AG: It felt like we were out there forever so I don't know if I had one more dunk in me. You saw me. I tried to throw it off the shot clock. At that point I had no idea what I was going to do.

DP: Which of Zach's dunks stood out to you?

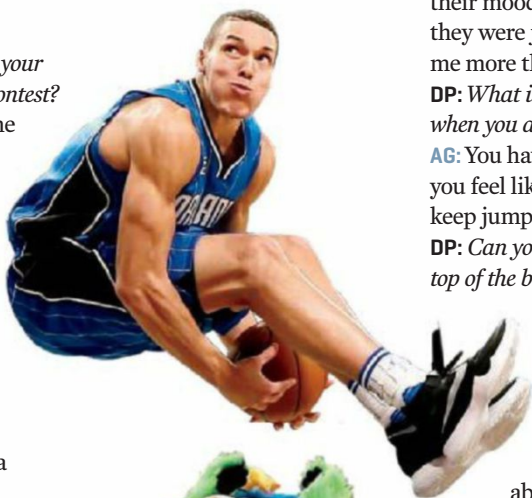
AG: The windmill from the free throw line was pretty impressive.

DP: Could you have done that?

AG: I think I could. It's more of a long jump, but you have to remain high enough in the air to flush it through. He went through the legs too, from pretty far out. That was pretty good.

DP: How did your family react to your not winning?

AG: They were disappointed



AARON GORDON

MAGIC TRICKS

The 20-year-old Orlando forward, who staged a brilliant but losing battle against Zach LaVine in the NBA Slam Dunk Contest, needs some fresh ideas before he starts thinking rematch.

at first. Once they realized how happy I had been to soak in the experience, their mood changed, and they were just proud of me more than anything.

DP: What is that feeling like when you are up in the air?

AG: You have so much energy, you feel like you can just keep jumping forever.

DP: Can you touch the top of the backboard?

AG: On that night [of the dunk contest], I really believe I could have. I don't know about today. My

adrenaline has worn off.

DP: Are you up for a rematch against Zach next year?

AG: I think the dunk contest is amazing, but a lot goes into it. It's going to take me a while to think of some new dunks. I kind of used them all up.

DP: Have you ever hit your head on the rim?

AG: No. On one of the dunks I was practicing I was getting close, so I had to scratch it.

DP: Hitting your head might have helped you win.

AG: Maybe if I had started gushing blood...

DP: What about wearing a helmet?

AG: That would be very innovative.

DP: There you go! 2017! And, you can put a microphone on it so people can hear.

AG: You might be on to something. Maybe I'll have you [come in] as a special guest. But you'll need a trampoline.

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Daytona 500 winner **Denny Hamlin** told

me that he couldn't credit his brilliant strategy for taking the checkered flag on Sunday. "It happened so fast," Hamlin said. "Going into the last lap I had no intention of winning that race. Somehow, I just put it all together."... ESPN



anchor **Linda Cohn**, who on Sunday

celebrated her 5,000th *SportsCenter* show, wasn't always sure sportscasting was for her. "I almost got fired two years in," Cohn said. "They hired a video coach to hone my skills."... **Jimmer**



Fredette, the Knicks' newly acquired

6' 2" guard, said people are often surprised he plays pro basketball: "At the NBA D-League All-Star Game [on Feb. 13] I went to the snack bar to get some food but forgot my credential. When I tried to get back in, the security lady was like, What are you doing? Why are you going back there near the players?"

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The Case for . . . Moving The NHL Trade Deadline

BY JEREMY FUCHS

THE NHL TRADE deadline occurs deeper into the hockey season than the deadlines for any of the three other major professional sports. Baseball players in new uniforms have roughly 60 games, or nearly one-third of the season, to hit their stride with a new team. Basketball players, too, get about a third of the season. Traded NFL players have half of the season to learn a new system. But hockey players have only about 20 games left after the deadline—a quarter of the NHL regular season.

That is barely enough time to find a new apartment, let alone acclimate to different teammates and a new system. It's why the final day of trading in the NHL is often a crapshoot.

A trade should allow a downtrodden team to receive value for players who don't fit into its long-term plans, give a team on the verge of the playoffs a shot to make the second season, or let a Cup contender boost its lineup.

The current NHL system benefits only two of those types of teams: the broken and the bubbled. Moving the deadline up would give players more time to feel comfortable, make good teams better and improve the quality of what is already the best playoffs in sports.

Ryan Miller was supposed to be the Blues' savior in goal when they acquired him from

the Sabres on March 1, 2014. Miller, the 2010 Vezina Trophy winner who was 33, had just 19 games to get comfortable in St. Louis. He played the worst hockey of his career, with a .903 save percentage, his lowest since a three-game call-up in 2003–04. In the playoffs Miller gave up 19 goals in six games as the Blues limped to a first-round exit. Miller left for Vancouver that off-season, and rebounded with a .911 save percentage.

Last season the Rangers acquired then 28-year-old defenseman Keith Yandle (*above*) from the Coyotes for forward Anthony Duclair, the team's top prospect, defenseman John Moore and a first-round pick. (New York also got journeyman defender Chris Summers.) The hope was that Yandle would boost a stagnant power play.



⌵
The hope
was that
Yandle
would
**boost a
stagnant
power
play.**
But he had
only seven
power-
play
points in
40 games.

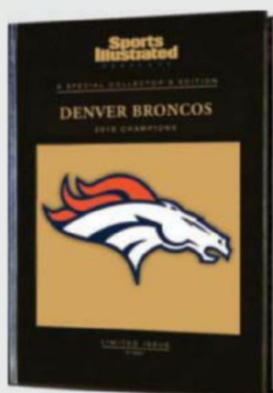
But Yandle never fit in with the Rangers' style on defense, and he had only seven power-play points over a total of 40 regular-season and playoff games. This season, now more accustomed to the way the Rangers play, Yandle leads the team with 29 assists.

While there are exceptions—Marian Gaborik scored 22 points in 26 playoff games for the Kings after being acquired from Columbus in 2014, and L.A. won the Stanley Cup—players often struggle after being traded. Moving the deadline back two weeks would give them roughly 27 games, a third of the season, to adjust, more in line with their NBA and MLB colleagues.

That extra time could make a difference. When winger James Neal was traded to the Penguins in 2011, he scored just two goals over 27 regular-season and playoff games. The **next** season, Neal scored a career-high 40 goals. When the Blues acquired defenseman Jay Bouwmeester in '13, he scored only seven points in the regular season. The next year he had 37 points, his most in four seasons.

Giving players a few more games to meld into their new teams will take some of the guesswork out of the deadline, emboldening GMs. A first-round pick to deliver Winnipeg left wing Andrew Ladd to Chicago? Bringing in Canucks right wing Radim Vrbata to play with Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin in Dallas? How about Hurricanes center Eric Staal moving alongside Ryan Johansen in Nashville? With enough games for players to develop a rapport with new linemates, such trades become less risky and more likely. Sounds like a good reason to move the calendar around. □

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• MMA

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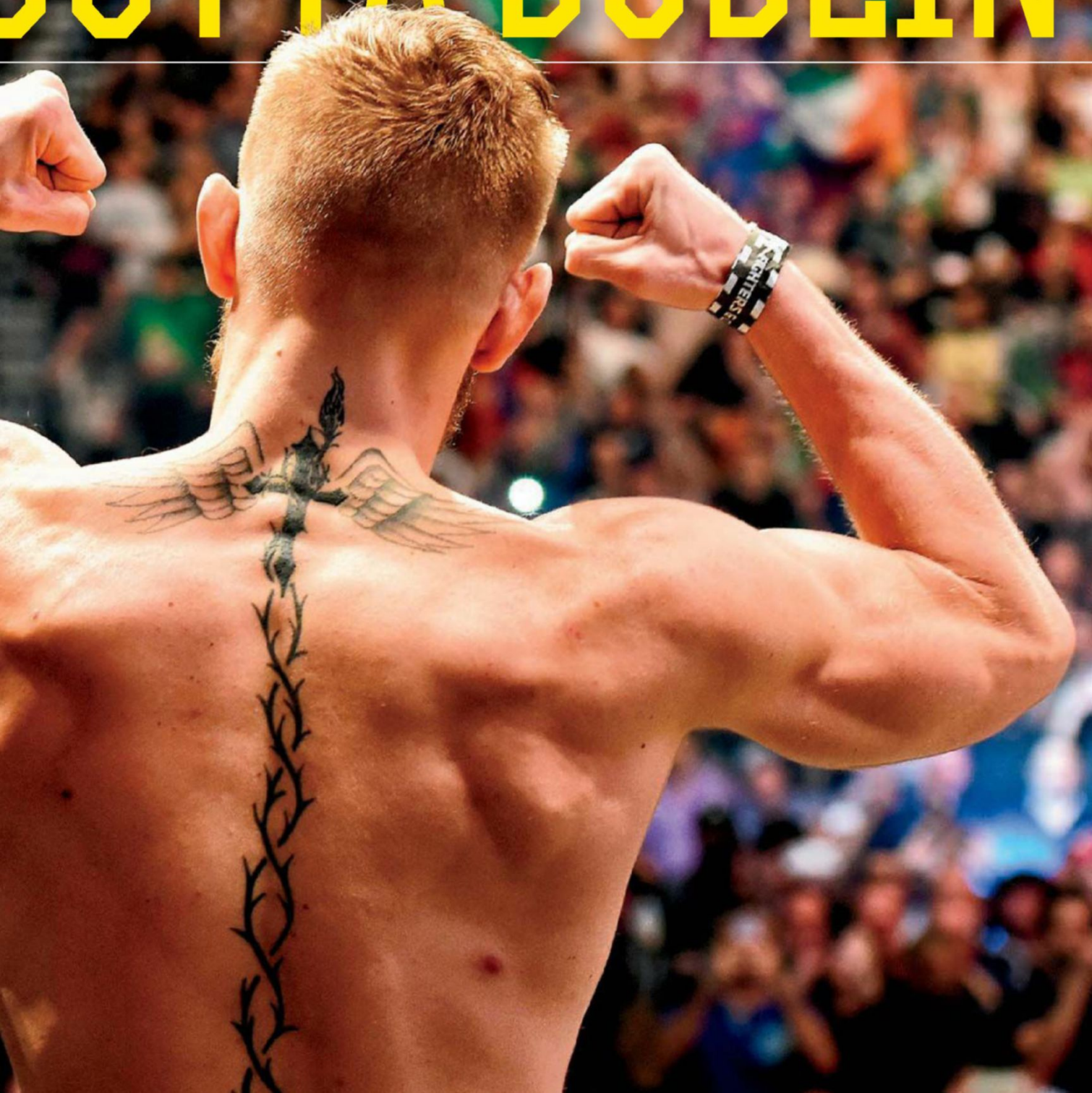
TRASH TALK, BRASH
PREDICTIONS AND A
SERIES OF RESOUNDING
WINS HAVE MADE CONOR
MCGREGOR THE UFC'S
LATEST STAR, BUT
THE FIGHTING PRIDE
OF IRELAND STILL
WANTS MORE

IN THEIR FACE

McGregor, here at the weigh-in for his Dec. 12, 2015, match against Aldo, has won 15 in a row, stirring fans and his countrymen with his insults as well as his assaults.

Photograph by
**Mike Roach/Zuffa LLC/
Getty Images**

OUTTA DUBLIN



W

“Waitin’ for Cooner Ma Greygar, are ye.”

It’s posed not as a question but as a knowing assertion on this relentlessly gray February day. The folks in and around the Straight Blast Gym—a charm-deprived fight club in a charm-deprived mini-mall in a charm-deprived exurb of Dublin—know this drill. They’ve seen the cameras and journalists and marketing folks come by the place, their ranks swelling steadily. And they know about the heroic waits that are endured before the visitors get an audience with the man they’ve come to see, Conor McGregor, the figure currently at the gravitational center of the UFC. Even the 10-year-old junior MMA fighter at the door says wisely, “He operates on his own time.”

You’ve most likely heard the saying that a measure of power is how long you can keep people waiting. But for McGregor, powerful as he is right now, that’s not really what this is about. You’d be hard-put to call McGregor a prima donna celebrity—not as long as he still thanks the countless fans after happily posing with them for photos. This is not another self-absorbed athlete—not as long as he ventures into monologues about the “deep responsibility” that comes with being an Irish champion, or talks with humility about “showing up to the gym every day as a white belt.”

What we have instead is an athlete so singularly committed to his craft—“obsessed” is the word he uses again and again—that any decision he faces is viewed through a prism of, *Does this help my fighting?* If the answer is slow in coming, the commitments fall by the wayside, not unlike so many of McGregor’s recent opponents. Text messages and voice mails pile up. Clocks are merely decorative. Food and drink are important only as they pertain to fighting weight. McGregor’s friends, family and longtime girlfriend know about his organizing principles.

It’s late Saturday night, more than a day after the appointed time, when McGregor finally feels it’s an agreeable moment to chat. He arrives, beard in full bloom, the top of a tattoo—a gorilla eating a human heart—peeking above his Henley shirt. He is unrecognizable as the hilarious blowhard whose talent for self-promotion rivals his talent for fighting. The guy who once told a shorter opponent, “I can rest my balls on your forehead”? Who exhorted, “Kiss them feet, Nazi,” before facing off against a German-based foe? Who earlier this month accepted the UFC’s Fighter of the Year award for 2015 via video—he didn’t want to interrupt his training—and lamented



to other fighters, “I need to feed all you bums”? No—where to be seen.

Instead, McGregor resembles a candidate on a job interview. And you want to hire him immediately. He makes eye contact, displays perfect posture and answers with measured, thoughtful responses, delivered with conviction but in a voice that sometimes requires you to lean in to hear. Yes, he’s living what he calls “the whatever-I-want life, and it’s a beautiful thing and an addictive lifestyle, this is.” But, preempting the obvious follow-up that such a situation might trigger complacency, he adds, “I use it as motivation to continue to push on, continue to live this life and get more.”

Yes, he concedes that he performs better the bigger the occasion. But in that quiet voice he adds, “Ultimately [pressure] is an illusion. What is it? Where is it? It’s just a state of mind.”

It becomes clear that inasmuch as McGregor has conquered the art of hype and promotion, he has done so only because it’s another facet of the fight game, a skill to master, much as you would a spinning backfist or takedown defense. All those self-aggrandizing rants, popularized by YouTube, are just part of the prefight theater that at once takes a psychic price on the opponent and triggers pay-per-view buys.



MCGREGOR ON POTENTIAL CHALLENGERS: "LINE THEM UP ON THEIR KNEES. I WANT THEM TO BEG ME."



BLOODY MOTIVATED

A TKO of Mendes (left) helped McGregor win UFC's Fighter of the Year in 2015. Hard work, he believes, will keep him on top of the sport.

As for McGregor's trademark predictive trash talk, it really isn't trash at all. If anything, it's the opposite. He's simply telling you his truths. When he predicts a knockout, he has seen it already. It's no more bombast or opinion than is,

say, eight squared is 64 or Dublin is Ireland's capital.

He has visualized it. And hard as that can be to explain, he starts and restarts his answer until he's satisfied that you understand it. "I have a deep, deep belief that if I tell you I'm going to crack you with a clean shot to the chin inside one minute of the first round and you will be unconscious, well, then that's what will happen. . . . I let [my opponent] know. I let the world know. Then I put it in a time frame. Then I go out and do it."

IT LEADS with the chin, the UFC does. The whole damn sport, in fact, has this aversion to risk aversion. Fighters don't traffic in the cautious safety of cliché. There are no cagey promoters, larding fighters' records by pitting them against tomato cans. There's no swirl of alphabet-soup sanctioning organizations, crowning different champs. Fighters can't—and don't want to—duck each other. In the UFC you're told when and who you're fighting.

But that free-swinging approach can also make the sport vulnerable. A year ago Ronda Rousey held all of mixed martial arts in a thrall—a badass fighter with serious presence, as sharp and precise with her words as with her fighting moves. But in November, Rousey was beaten up and then laid out by Holly Holm, one of the great upsets in the sport's history.

Rousey's face and aura were perforated in equal measure. Her career was suddenly placed in escrow. And the UFC had a problem. The same way nature abhors a vacuum, sports—this one in particular—abhors a star void. "It wasn't like, Oh, no, we need a star, what the f--- are we gonna do?" recalls Dana White, the UFC's unfailingly candid majordomo. "It was more like, There's an opportunity here. Which one of you guys is gonna fill it?"

Four Saturdays later White had his answer. A 27-year-old Irish fighter known as much for his mouth as his fists, Conor McGregor wasn't merely certain that he was going to defeat José Aldo—the champion, the favorite and a fighter who hadn't lost in more than a decade—to win the featherweight belt. Channeling the young Cassius Clay, McGregor specifically called the round, the first one. And he was so supremely certain that he promised that anyone who could furnish a betting slip confirming that they'd wagered on a first-round knockout would get free admission to his postfight party.

On fight night, while the undercard matches played out, UFC cameras showed McGregor in his dressing room, preparing to slip and counterpunch when Aldo charged at him. It was as if someone had leaked him the script in advance. The opening horn still echoing, Aldo lunged at McGregor, who countered with a left. The punch collided with Aldo's face. Aldo collided with the canvas. To hell with McGregor's habit of keeping folks waiting. Like that, the most anticipated fight of the year wasn't a fight at all; it was an intensely violent Vine. Official time of the knockout: 13 seconds. The postfight party made St. Patrick's Day look like a subdued, temperate weekday.

McGregor was already popular, especially among Irish fans, thousands of whom ventured to Las Vegas to see the fight. This, though, elevated him to new, global heights. He benefited from the It-ain't-braggin'-if-

you-can-back-it-up dictum. Beyond that—and here again McGregor draws the inevitable Muhammad Ali comparisons—his showmanship is rooted in so much wit and cartoonishness that it all comes across as endearing. McGregor has fashioned with the public the same unspoken bargain that Ali did. *I'll be outrageous for you. You recognize that it's part of the kabuki. And don't hold it against me.*

In the days after the fight McGregor took to his Twitter account, @TheNotoriousMMA, to taunt potential challengers. "Line them up on their knees with their hands out. I want them to beg me." When a story surfaced that his image might grace the back of a one-euro coin, McGregor tweeted, "The boom is BACK baby!!! #F---TheRecession." On his Instagram feed he posted a photo of himself in a sports car, wearing a mask and brandishing a gun. (He claimed it was in preparation for a movie role.) "Let's put it this way," says White. "Conor is very calculating."

Here's what McGregor didn't hype on social media: his rounds of sparring, his functional workouts, the incalculable number of push-ups and one-legged squats he has performed. His coach, John Kavanagh, hears all the references to McGregor's shocking personality and laughs. "Yeah, yeah," says Kavanagh. "I would say to people: Form your opinion after meeting him rather than just seeing the character on TV."

But the coach gets even more upset when asked about McGregor's apparent wealth of natural talent. "To be honest, I find that insulting towards him," says Kavanagh. "I've seen the work rate. I've seen him be the first one in here and the last one out, just training himself, at times going into the overtraining area. Now people are seeing the fruits of that labor and they call it natural talent? I can do nothing but smile at that."

FOR SUCH a transcendent, unique fighter, McGregor's origin story is fiercely conventional. He grew up as a working-class kid in Dublin, the son of a cabdriver and a homemaker. He was a bright but indifferent student, filled with mischief but never in serious trouble. Tony McGregor brought his only son to the Crumlin Boxing Club when the kid was 10. Conor thought he loved soccer, but the fighting, that nourished him. "I just wanted to be able to be comfortable and confident if someone said something to me or something happened: strike hard, strike fast, make my exit safely," he says. "Then what happens is that it becomes addictive."

In his late teens McGregor was still fighting, adding jujitsu to his boxing foundation. But it was as a hobbyist. Following a path of least resistance, he began to work as an apprentice plumber. He saw the veterans on the job sites, faces drawn and creased, hardened hands and bodies aged beyond their years. Not for him. He reckons, "Yes, sir, no, sir, clock in, clock out. Why were you late? Why are you not in today?" That's not how humans are supposed to live."

One day he decided he wouldn't show up for

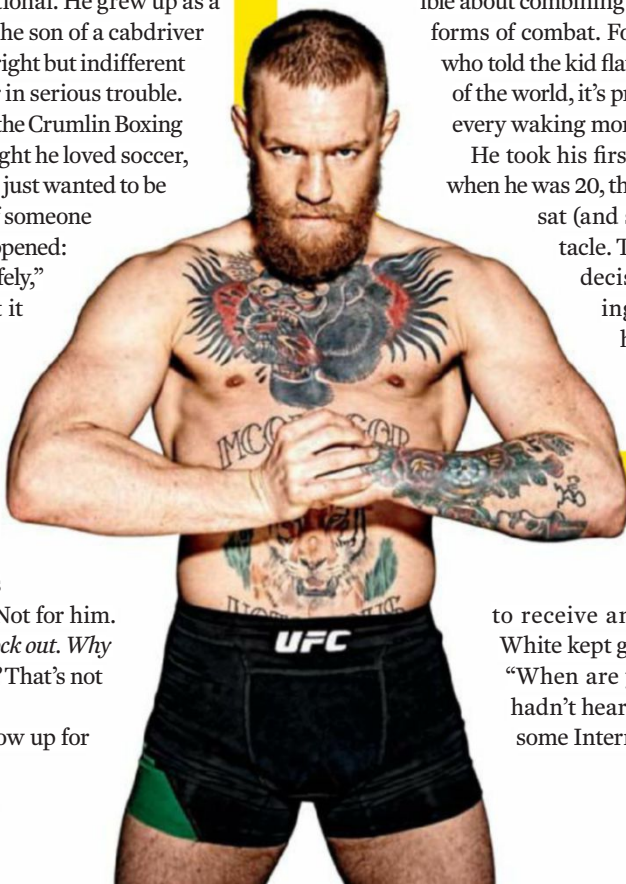
**"I JUST FIGURED OUT THAT
IF I GAVE MY ALL, THEN I
WOULD EVENTUALLY RUN THE
FIGHT BUSINESS."**



work and instead committed full-time to this fast-growing, Internet-fueled, newfangled sport, mixed martial arts. MMA drew its critics—especially in boxing-mad Ireland—but to McGregor there was something irresistible about combining his boxing with any and all other forms of combat. For his coach he chose Kavanagh, who told the kid flatly, "You want to be the champion of the world, it's pretty simple: It just has to be your every waking moment." McGregor bought in.

He took his first pro fight in 2008. A year later, when he was 20, the UFC came to Dublin. McGregor sat (and stood) mesmerized by the spectacle. That night McGregor felt that his decision to devote himself to fighting had been validated. Inspired, he kept winning. A brawler but with obvious skills, he needed all of 16 seconds to win one fight. His next one lasted four seconds. Like a cult band, it was a matter of time before he went mainstream.

Around the same time, Dana White visited Dublin to receive an award from Trinity College. White kept getting asked the same question: "When are you gonna sign Conor?" White hadn't heard of McGregor but searched out some Internet clips and saw all the fuss. In-





trigued, White invited McGregor to come to the UFC's Las Vegas headquarters. Marveling at McGregor's personality, White persuaded his partners to sign up this prospect for an inexpensive, low-risk contract. "A penny stock," White often calls it.

The stock took off. On April 6, 2013, McGregor won his UFC debut, requiring barely a minute to destroy the opponent. When he received a \$60,000 knockout-of-the-night bonus, McGregor marveled, "I was collecting 188 euros a week off the social welfare, and here I am and I've got 60 G's bonus and my own pay!" He's had a half-dozen UFC fights since—against increasingly stiff opposition—and has looked better each time.

He's now up to 15 straight fights without a loss. As one of the few UFC fighters who get a cut of the pay-per-view take, McGregor is a millionaire many times over. Offers for movie roles and endorsements flood in. And McGregor isn't at all surprised. "I just figured out that if I gave my all into this game—if I put everything into the fight business—then I would eventually run the fight business," he says, without stopping to smile. "That's where we are right now."

NEVER MIND the pain of being punched—"getting blasted" in UFC-speak—fighters will tell you that the real agony comes before the fight. "The cut," the molting of body mass to make your appointed weight, is a brutal physical/mental/spiritual challenge—so excruciating, in fact, that

during the cut, these alpha men can be found crying, curled in fetal position.

Some fighters manage the cut better than others. For McGregor, it's pure hell. Standing 5' 9", he walks around at 170 pounds or so; then he diminishes himself to reach the featherweight limit of 145 pounds. "Every time I'm deep in the cut," he says, "I say, 'This is where it's earned.'"

For his next fight McGregor will not have to endure this. Though McGregor is the reigning featherweight champion, on March 5 in Vegas he fights Brazil's Rafael dos Anjos for the lightweight belt. He'll only have

to get down to 155 pounds. Never before has a UFC fighter held two belts simultaneously.

On its face it's nuts, another example of the UFC leading with its chin. Here's this newly minted star, and you not only want to rush him back into action, but do so against a bigger fighter? Kavanagh doesn't see it that way. This is simply the more honorable way to fight. "Somebody is in a bar, you don't stop and ask, 'What weight are you? You have to be able to defend yourself against whoever is attacking you.'" Could Kavanagh see McGregor going up to a third weight class? "Yes, I could," says the coach. "I've seen him spar plenty of welterweights. He's done very well."

More important, McGregor welcomes the challenge. "[Aldo] was the pound-for-pound No. 1. He had beaten everybody. I had beaten everybody. Then I beat him in 13 seconds," he says. "Really, what else is there to do?"

Ask him how he sees the Dos Anjos fight going, and he'll tell you he's not prognosticating. He's simply filling you in on a movie he's already seen. He says flatly, "In reality it will be a one-minute demolition job. I'm going to press him. Many people don't understand ring control. They think they do until they're against someone who really understands how to set traps, how to create holes in the octagon that they fall into. He will learn on March 5, and he will learn it pretty early."

And then what? "Take all the belts, take all the money, ride back to beautiful Dublin, Ireland, into the sunset."

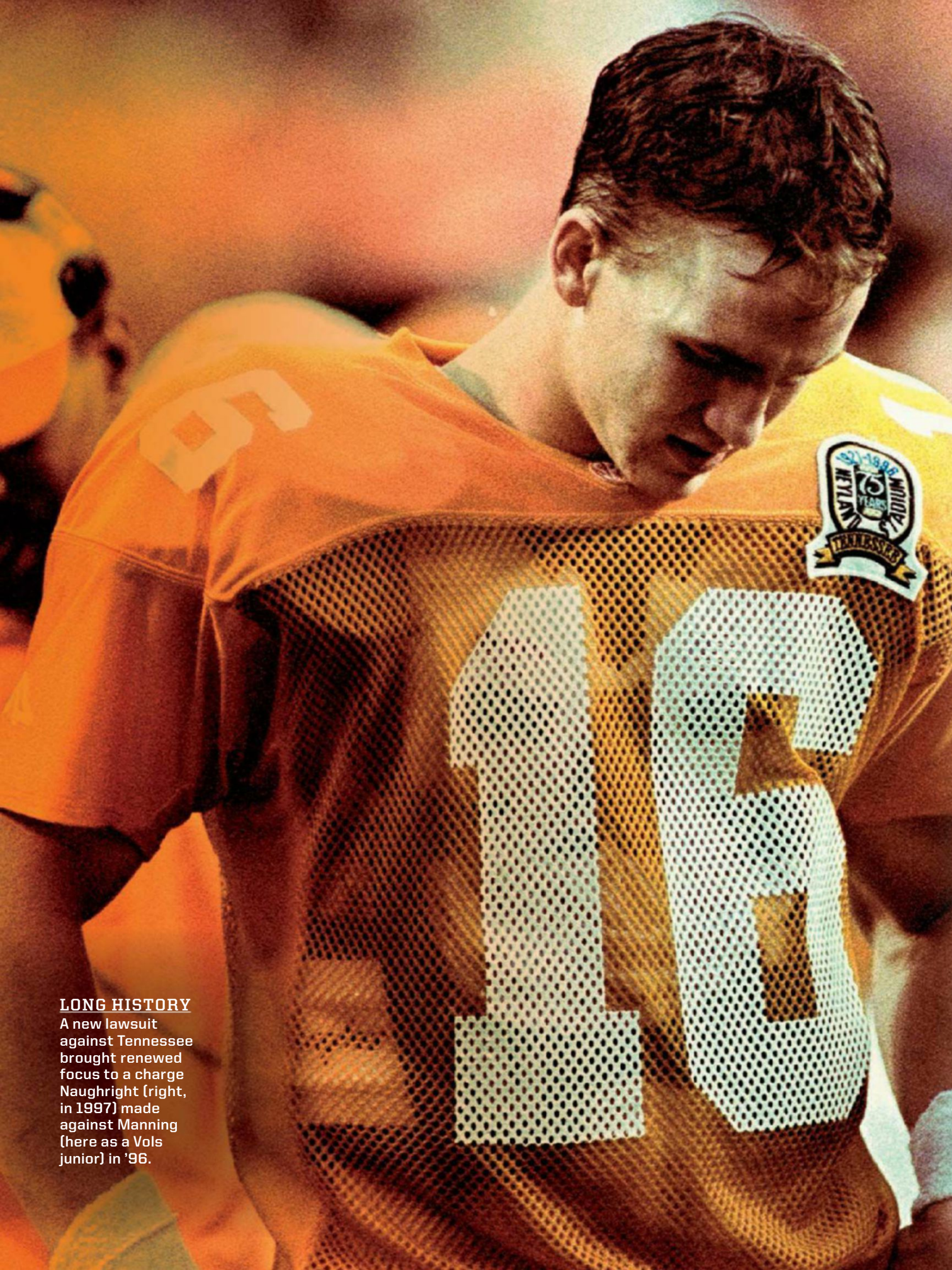
He speaks with such conviction, you think that maybe he has visualized this. And then again, maybe he's wishing. But we'll care. And we'll wait. And we'll watch. Which, of course, means that Conor McGregor has already won. □

CALLED SHOTS

After predicting his destruction of Aldo, McGregor basked in the reality (below). Now he faces a step-up in weight.



For a video visit with Conor McGregor in Dublin as he prepared for his March 5 lightweight championship showdown against Rafael dos Anjos, go to SI.com/films



LONG HISTORY

A new lawsuit against Tennessee brought renewed focus to a charge Naughtright (right, in 1997) made against Manning (here as a Vols junior) in '96.

Culture Clash

A 20-year-old harassment case at Tennessee involving Peyton Manning has generated headlines, but many current and former members of the university community believe there are problems in the athletic department that run much deeper

**BY GREG BISHOP,
THAYER EVANS AND
BEN BASKIN**

Photograph by
Albert Dickson/TSN/Icon Sportswire



INS ARCHIVE/ANNOVILLE NEWS SENTINEL/ZUMAPRESS.COM

IN THE spring of 2013 a vice chancellor at Tennessee wrote an internal memo that skewered the university's athletic department. His complaints read like a CliffsNotes version of the what's-wrong-with-major-college-sports guidebook. The department, the vice chancellor said, refused to address an "inordinate number of disciplinary cases involving athletes" and wielded "undue influence and diminishes or eliminates the independence of thought and action necessary for unbiased review." When the school did hand down punishments to misbehaving athletes, the penalties were met with "constant criticism" from athletic officials.

The salvo laid blame at the highest levels of the university—with president Joe DiPietro, chancellor Jimmy Cheek and athletic director Dave Hart Jr. Their actions and the athletics culture they created, the memo asserted, placed both students and the school's institutional integrity "at peril."

The memo, which was leaked to *The Tennessean* in March 2015, was as notable for who wrote it as for what it said. The author was Tim Rogers, a university employee for over 38 years who, for the final decade of his tenure, oversaw the office that investigated student misconduct. In May 2013, Rogers abruptly announced that he was leaving the school, telling Cheek that he found the chancellor's failure to address his concerns to be an "intolerable situation." In particular, he was troubled by the administration's rejection of his proposal for a campuswide program to address issues of sexual assault. Around the time the memo became public, Cheek told *The Tennessean* that he had heard that Rogers's staff had been "too strict" in how it disciplined athletes.

Nearly three years later Rogers's memo sounds

ominously prophetic. On Feb. 9 six unidentified women sued the university, alleging that the athletic department turned a blind eye to transgressions by athletes and created a “hostile sexual environment” and “rape culture.” The suit centers on five cases of alleged sexual assault by athletes between 2013 and ’15 that, the suit argues, the university failed to properly investigate and adjudicate. The suit claims that Tennessee has long been in violation of Title IX, which in addition to mandating fairness in funding for men’s and women’s sports also sets guidelines for how federally funded institutions should handle sexual assault complaints.

The complaint runs 64 pages and cites examples of alleged Title IX violations at UT over the past two decades. But one paragraph on page 8 received the most attention: It describes a 1996 sexual harassment claim directed at Peyton Manning, then a 19-year-old sophomore quarterback. He was alleged to have exposed himself to Jamie Naughtright (then named Jamie Whited), a female trainer, as she examined Manning’s injured foot. (The details of the allegation have changed over time: In 2003, during litigation of a defamation suit brought against Manning, Naughtright said that Manning had actually pushed his genitals onto her face. Manning, in a court deposition, said he had been mooning a teammate as part of a joke, something the teammate denied in sworn testimony.)

The Title IX lawsuit sheds no new light on the Manning case, for which the quarterback has never faced criminal charges; he has twice settled



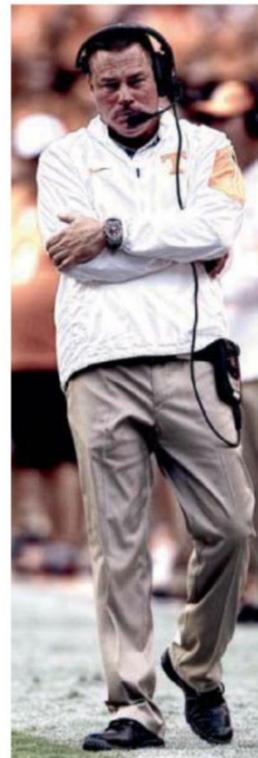
judiciary process. An athletic culture with few checks and balances reminded her of another well-known college sports scandal, in spirit if not in the details. “In regards to the culture at Tennessee,” she says, “I said on many occasions, Does Penn State mean nothing?”

LAST SPRING the federal government initiated two Title IX investigations of Tennessee. The findings have not been made public, but the Feb. 9 lawsuit is built around the same incidents as the federal investigation.

The suit alleges sexual assaults by Yemi Makanjuola, a men’s basketball player from 2011 to ’13; former football players A.J. Johnson, Michael Williams and Riyahd Jones; and a football player listed as

John Doe I. (Jones’s accuser, a UT student, declined to press charges after the alleged incident in February 2015. Campus officials found that Makanjuola had violated the student code of conduct with “objectionably offensive” behavior in March 2013, but no criminal charges were brought. Johnson and Williams were each charged with aggravated rape after an incident in February 2015; each pleaded not guilty and is scheduled to go on trial this summer.)

The suit also alleges that Cheek, Hart and Butch Jones acted in violation of Title IX by showing “deliberate



indifference” to the allegations and by exerting “direct interference” with the university disciplinary process. The lawsuit also says that receiver Drae Bowles was assaulted by other football players for assisting the female UT student who accused Johnson and Williams of rape. (Bowles denied that he had been assaulted to the *Knoxville News Sentinel*.)

The lawsuit, which seeks unspecified damages, alleges other instances of favorable treatment of athletes: investigations of assaults that stalled, or shifted,

SAYS WRIGHT, “I KNEW I WAS GOING TO BE PRESSURED BY THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR,” WHEN LOOKING INTO ATHLETE MISBEHAVIOR.

MEN OF SCRUTINY

Hart (above) has been named in several lawsuits; Jones (right) insists the school has no “culture problem.”

suits with Naughtright for undisclosed terms. But the mention of Manning created media scrutiny that shined a light on a Tennessee athletic culture long thought by many on campus to be corrosive and hostile to women.

Reached by phone this week, Rogers declined to comment; he did say that he “stands by everything 100%” from his 2013 memo. Butch Jones, the school’s football coach, told *The Tennessean* last Saturday that “there is no culture problem” at UT. But Jenny Wright, the director of student judicial affairs at the university from 2011 to ’13 and the associate director of the same office from 2008 to ’11, had voiced concerns to her supervisors while employed there about athletic department meddling in the school’s



VOLUNTEERS UNDER FIRE

Johnson (left) and Williams (right) are accused of raping a female UT athlete in 2014 and will stand trial this summer; Makanjuola (center) was accused of sexual assault while playing for the Vols in 2013, but no criminal charges were filed.

or disappeared; whistle-blowers who lost their jobs or retired shortly after they leveled complaints about the ways athletes were (or weren't) disciplined. (On Monday a Tennessee spokesperson said the university could not comment on pending litigation but added that "we disagree with" the notion that the athletic department has interfered with the school's judicial process.) Wright says, "There was underlying pressure of wanting to make sure I did everything perfectly because I knew I was going to be pressured by the athletic director, and by the chancellor" to go easy when looking into allegations of athlete misbehavior.

Ron Leadbetter, the school's associate general counsel from 1972 to 2008, says that what he hears and reads is troubling. "The university, in the last several years, has been more concerned with bad p.r. than about taking action to protect its students," he says. "It concerns me as a citizen."

THOUGH THE suit cites behavior dating to the mid 1990s, its most serious allegations are concentrated in the years since Hart took over as AD in 2011. Hart is a longtime college sports administrator who worked at East Carolina, Florida State and Alabama before Tennessee—and who arrived in Knoxville with a track record of questions about his handling of gender and sexual assault issues. In 2003, while Hart was athletic director at FSU, an internal investigation of the athletic department found that officials, Hart included, failed to immediately report an allegation of rape against a football player. In 1997 a gender-discrimination lawsuit filed by Christianne Gobrecht, the former Seminoles women's basketball coach, alleged that

the school's female coaches were treated worse, paid less and trained in lesser facilities than their male counterparts. She alleged that Hart lied about those differences and violated Title IX repeatedly. The suit was settled for undisclosed terms.

In 2012, JoAnne Graf, an FSU hall of famer and the winningest softball coach in NCAA history, wrote an open letter in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* saying that Hart was "a bully to women directly and indirectly."

"It's pretty obvious that Dave Hart does not treat fe-

males the way he treats males," she says now. "I do see a pattern. . . [There] was intimidation, bullying, threatening—the appreciate-what-you-got-or-take-off kind of mentality."

On Monday, Hart said of Graf: "We agreed to disagree on some things." When asked if he was bothered in general by the lawsuits naming him, Hart responded: "They do not. I know who I am and what I stand for."

Some UT employees say that Hart's heavy-handedness has continued in Knoxville. Wright says she was criticized by Hart for being too strict in the cases of athletes. Before a female athletics luncheon in 2012, Wright says, Hart leaned in until his face was inches away and screamed at her about overprosecuting athletes in front of hundreds of colleagues—an event that Rogers witnessed and referenced in his 2013 memo. ("I never met with Jenny Wright during my tenure here," Hart says. "Nor did I ever have a conversation with Jenny Wright. I didn't know what she even looked like.")

"When I think about it, I still feel overwhelming shock," she says. Wright also says she received a phone call from Brad Pendergrass, then director of football operations, who she says told her, "You can't hide from us. We know where to find you." (Pendergrass has denied that he said that to her.)

"After I got that phone call, I started to feel worried and afraid," she says. She voiced concerns about the practice of "active interference" by the athletic department that included coaches helping witnesses "get their story straight." Wright also says that Cheek told her not to pursue an investigation in the case of Marlin Lane, a football player accused of sexual assault in April 2013. (Lane was never arrested, and his accuser did not press charges.)

Wright was accused of having inappropriate relations with student athletes and fired by Tennessee on May 13, 2013. A year later a university investigation cleared her of wrongdoing after finding no evidence to substantiate the claims.

"Dave Hart and the administrators above him [demonstrated] deplorable treatment of women who played major roles in the Women's Athletic Department who, after the men's and women's departments were merged on his watch [in 2011], were either demoted or essentially

fired for ‘insubordination’ just because they disagreed with him on certain issues,” says Barbara Mead, a professor of human performance and sport studies at Tennessee from 1971 to ’97. “Hart has also led an effort to diminish women’s athletics at UT because their success was outshining that of the men.”

A suit filed by Deborah Jennings, the Lady Vols’ media director who worked at the school for 35 years, against the university and Hart in 2012 alleged that after the men’s and women’s departments consolidated in ’11 she was “marginalized and ostracized and denied employment op-

A FORMER UT LAWYER SAYS THE SCHOOL “HAS BEEN MORE CONCERNED WITH BAD P.R. THAN ABOUT TAKING ACTION.”

TOWERING FIGURES

Summitt (with Cheek, center, and Hart, far right, in 2013) filed a sworn affidavit saying she was pushed into retirement by the AD.



portunities due to her gender.” Jennings also alleged that Hart and others “fostered a culture of intimidation and hostility” when they regarded employees as disloyal or divisive—a label she received, she says, when she brought up complaints about gender discrimination. The lawsuit notes that in one round of athletic department layoffs in 2012, 12 of the 15 employees who were let go were female. After the layoffs, the suit says, 13 of the 15 senior members of the athletic department’s senior administrative staff, or 86.7%, were male. Of the 23 executive staff and senior administrative staff positions, the lawsuit says, 20 were male (87%), three were female (13%) and none were African-American. The plaintiffs also included a sworn affidavit from legendary UT women’s basketball coach Pat Summitt, who stated that Hart forced her into early retirement in 2012. “That accusation is absolutely false,” says Hart. (Summitt was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2011. She later amended her stance and said she may have misinterpreted Hart’s comments.)

Jennings’s lawsuit says the school retaliated to her suit with a “libelous memo” that maintained she had been fired for unsatisfactory performance. In 2014 she settled with Tennessee for \$320,000, with no admission of wrongdoing by the school. In another suit in 2012 former athletic trainers Jenny Moshak, Heather Mason and Collin Schlosser claimed employees in the women’s athletic department were paid less than their male counterparts before being replaced by less qualified male candidates. The university settled with them for at least \$1.05 million.

“Prior cases settled by the University of Tennessee are not an admission of guilt,” Hart told SI on Monday. “Quite the contrary. We wanted to move on.”

THE TITLE IX lawsuit is hardly the first record of UT’s alleged tone-deafness toward sexual harassment. The allegations against Manning first came to light when Naughtright filed a complaint with the Tennessee Human Rights Commission and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1996. She cited 27 examples of harassment and discrimination that she said took place from ’94 through ’96—including players who nicknamed her breasts “midgets” and referred to her in crude, homophobic terms; supervisors who protected athletes who harassed her; and an incident at a car wash in which an athlete poured water over a female TV reporter. Tennessee’s Office of Diversity Resources and Educational Resources (DRES) found that Naughtright was “not subjected to unwelcome sexual conduct” and that many of the allegations were “not sexual in nature.”

The Manning incident was number 27 on Naughtright’s list; in 1997 she settled her claim with Tennessee for \$300,000. Though the recent Title IX suit has again made her 20-year-old allegations headline news, she has not commented on that case. Manning is not targeted in the Title IX suit, and it’s unlikely he would be compelled to testify. But Tennessee’s most famous alum, fresh off a Super Bowl victory, is now entangled in the darker side of the school’s athletic culture. □

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BEFORE LAST season, NFL futility was headquartered in three cities: Oakland, Tampa and Jacksonville. The Raiders, Buccaneers and Jaguars each failed to reach a total of 20 wins over the four seasons from 2011 to '14, and they combined for a staggering 142 losses. Their average first-round draft position during those years (2012 to '15) was 5.8.

Last season, though, the downtrodden trio experienced a bit of an upturn. The Raiders (7–9) and the Bucs (6–10) both harbored playoff hopes until early December. The Jags finished a less encouraging 5–11, but for the first time in eight years, they ranked in the top half of the league in scoring.

For all three teams there's reason to believe the future is at last more formidable than forlorn. Progress must be made in each of the following areas—though in some cases the job is close to done—if they are to truly abandon their futile ways.

Getting the Signal-caller Straight

Raiders As a rookie in 2014, Derek Carr had a respectable completion percentage (58.1) and touchdown-to-interception ratio (21 to 12), but they were largely a product of Oakland's short-passing scheme. He gained just 5.46 yards per attempt, the fifth lowest ever for a rookie with 400 throws.

Last year Carr not only amped up his accuracy (61.1%), but with the addition of the No. 4 choice, Amari Cooper from Alabama, and a bounce-back year from fellow receiver Michael Crabtree, Carr also threw for 32 touchdowns and guided a passing game that was at times downright dangerous. Taken with the 36th pick out of Fresno State, Carr looks like the best QB from the 2014 class, and the combination of his strong right arm and Cooper's talent gives Oakland stability in the right places.

Buccaneers If there was any doubt about how vital the development of a star quarterback is to the future of an organization, Tampa Bay erased it by firing Lovie Smith last month. In Chicago, Smith's downfall was his inability to build an offensive staff that could get the most out of Jay Cutler. With the Bucs, Smith assembled an impressive group of offensive coaches, and it proved to be his undoing: When other teams began to show interest in poaching coordinator Dirk Koetter and making him their head coach, Tampa promoted Koetter into Smith's job.

Save for a Week 1 nightmare against the Titans (a 42–14 loss), Koetter's work with No. 1 pick Jameis Winston was impressive. Winston's 4,042 passing yards were the third most ever by a rookie, behind



PRO FOOTBALL +

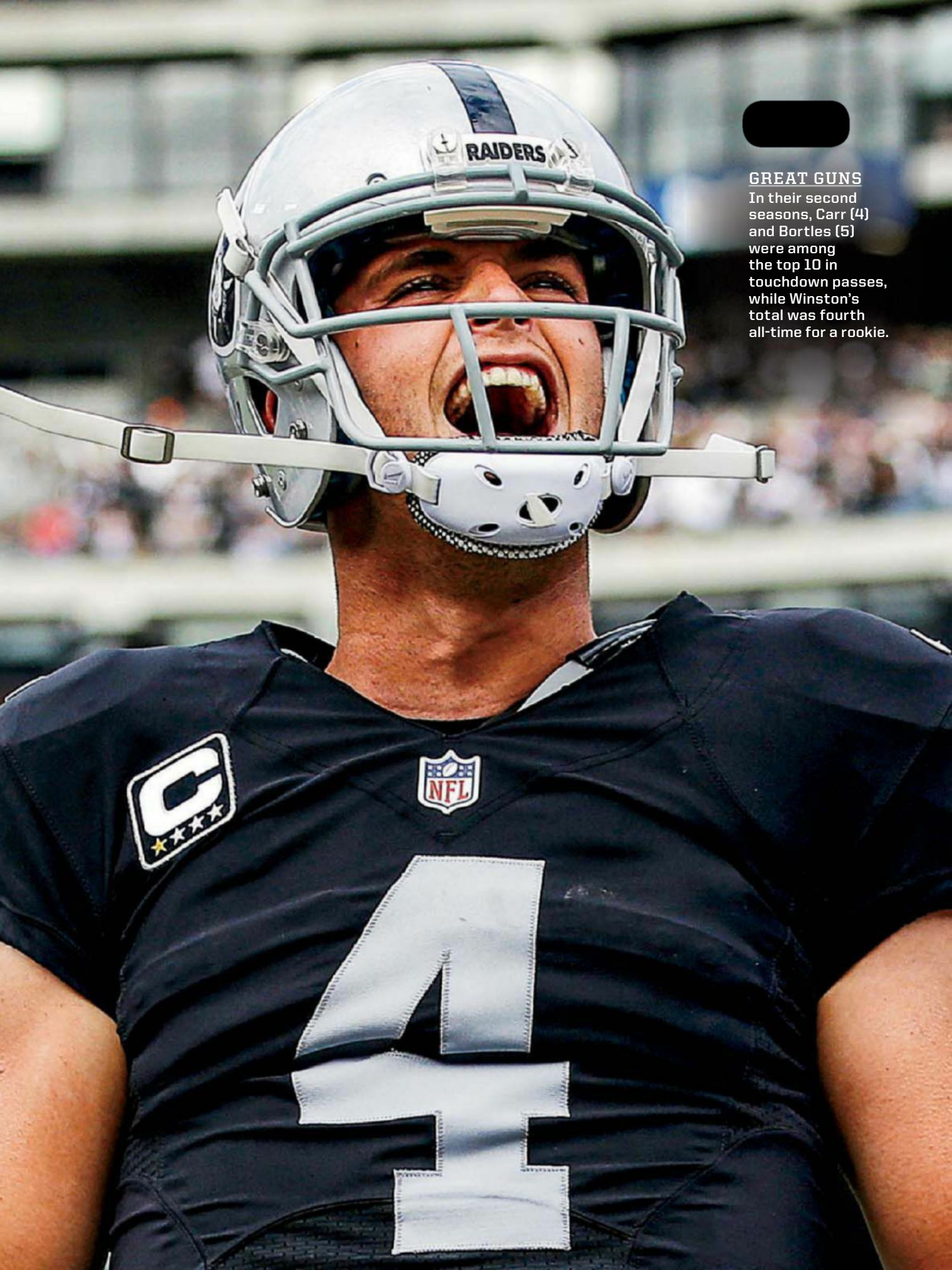
THE WALKING DEAD

THERE ARE SIGNS OF LIFE IN OAKLAND, TAMPA BAY AND JACKSONVILLE, WHERE THE NFL'S MOST HAPLESS FRANCHISES ARE BUILDING ON STRONG YOUNG ARMS AND THE ENCOURAGING SIGNS OF A SEASON AGO

BY ROBERT MAYS

Photograph by
Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP

SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES (BORTLES); MATT HAZLETT/GETTY IMAGES (WINSTON)



GREAT GUNS

In their second seasons, Carr (4) and Bortles (5) were among the top 10 in touchdown passes, while Winston's total was fourth all-time for a rookie.

Andrew Luck (2012) and Cam Newton ('11); only Peyton Manning, Russell Wilson and Luck surpassed Winston's rookie touchdown total of 22. **Jaguars** The strategy surrounding Blake Bortles was clear from the start. Once David Caldwell took the Central Florida quarterback with the third pick in the 2014 draft, the GM went about making sure that Bortles had enough weapons to ensure his success. Caldwell used both his second-round picks in 2014 on receivers, and wideout Allen Hurns, an undrafted free agent, has given the Jags 1,708 yards and 16 TDs over two seasons.

Bortles has still spent too much time on the turf—106 sacks in two seasons—but his maturation and the improvements in his receiving corps have ignited Jacksonville's offense. After finishing 32nd in passing DVOA (Football Outsiders' metric for efficiency) in 2014, the Jags jumped to 20th. Bortles threw 35 touchdown passes, tied for second in the league and more than three times his rookie-year total.

More Star Power

Raiders Two years ago, as a rookie, outside linebacker Khalil Mack pressured quarterbacks but was often a step shy of taking them down. There was no such gap last year, when his sack total jumped to 15 from four. Against both the run and the pass, the 6' 3", 252-pound Mack is a superstar, plain and simple, and he should remain a superstar for years to come.

Add Mack's impact to what Carr and Cooper were able to do in their first year together and it's easy to understand why there's excitement in Oakland. Cooper had 10 drops as a rookie, second most in the league, but it's likely that number will, well, drop. After a series of misspent high picks dating to 2007—JaMarcus Russell, Darren McFadden, Darrius Heyward-Bey, Rolando McClain—Mack and Cooper have already shown the talent to justify their top five status.

Buccaneers Gerald McCoy remains one of the league's best defensive players, and the 28-year-old tackle has the six-year, \$95.2 million contract to prove it. But aside from McCoy and weakside linebacker Lavonte David, Tampa Bay's D still lacks top-tier talent. Two of the Bucs' highest defensive picks from recent drafts—end Da'Quan Bowers (2011) and safety Mark Barron ('12)—failed to pan out.

On offense, wide receiver Mike Evans must return to the brilliant form he flashed as a rookie two years ago rather than his erratic 2015. Winston to Evans can be the fulcrum of Koetter's offense for years—especially if Tampa Bay can't re-sign free-agent running back Doug Martin, who finished second in the NFL in rushing (1,402 yards).

Jaguars In this area, Jacksonville is a distant third behind Tampa and Oakland. Outside Bortles, the team's recent first-round picks have yielded little: Quarterback Blaine Gabbert and wideout Justin Blackmon are no longer on the roster. (Defensive end Dante Fowler, who went No. 3 in 2015, missed last year with a torn left ACL.)

The only highly drafted Jaguar to set himself apart has been Allen Robinson, a second-rounder out of Penn State in 2014. He has proved to be a true downfield threat for Bortles, earning a spot in the Pro Bowl with 1,400 yards and 14 touchdowns last season.

Sleeper Hits

Raiders Left guard Gabe Jackson, a third-round pick in 2014 who has started 28 games in two seasons, has been Oakland's only real find outside the top 32 (aside from Carr). The team's climb back to respect-

**PROGRESS MUST BE
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RECEPTION COMMITTEE

Evans (below) needs to bounce back from an uneven year, while Robinson (15) showed ample promise for a second-round pick and Cooper (89) justified going No. 4 last April.



ability has been mostly fueled by excellent work in the second- and third-tier free-agent market.

Cut by the Bucs in 2014, left tackle Donald Penn has been a mainstay for one of the best pass-protecting lines in the league. Center Rodney Hudson and right tackle Austin Howard also arrived via free agency, and Crabtree played so well on his short-term deal that the Raiders have handed him a four-year, \$34 million extension.

Buccaneers Tampa Bay's two biggest steals have come at linebacker. The 58th pick in 2012, David has been a tackle machine at the Will, and Kwon Alexander made a strong case for NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year as a fourth-rounder out of LSU.

Ultimately, the success of the Bucs' recent drafts will hinge on their two second-round picks from last spring. Donovan Smith struggled at left tackle, and guard Ali Marpet, coming from Division III Hobart, suffered growing pains. If they turn into



WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES (ROBINSON); EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES (COOPER)

solid starters, GM Jason Licht's second draft will have netted a franchise quarterback and two building blocks up front.

Jaguars Telvin Smith was an undersize linebacker who fell to the fifth round despite a stellar career at Florida State. In two seasons he has made 23 starts. A torn right ACL sent Oklahoma cornerback Aaron Colvin tumbling down draft boards in 2014, but the fourth-rounder started 15 games last year and



piled up 60 tackles with four sacks.

Two of the Jags' more promising draft assets didn't see much of the field in 2015. Guard Brandon Linder, a third-round pick in '14 who excelled as a rookie, tore his left labrum and was placed on injured reserve after only three games. And before he was hurt in training camp, Fowler was supposed to be the pass rushing nightmare who could help the Jags take another step forward. He might still be that.

A Clear Plan

Raiders While Oakland needs to decide what happens with Penn, a free agent, the offense is at least on the right track. An improved running game would go a long way in making the Carr-Cooper connection even more dynamic, and there's a chance the Raiders will look for a bit of interior offensive line help in the middle

rounds. But the majority of personnel upgrades need to come on the defensive side. Safety Charles Woodson has retired, and the rest of the secondary isn't exactly filled with stars.

Buccaneers Of the three teams, Tampa Bay is the only one that, in a way, is starting over. This will be Koetter's first season as a head coach, and former Falcons coach Mike Smith will be making a return to the sideline as his defensive coordinator.

Smith has his work cut out for him. The Bucs need upgrades at every level of their defense, especially at edge rusher and in the secondary. They can't afford many more seasons in which former undrafted free agent Jacquies Smith is their top sack-getter on the outside, and Chris Conte and Bradley McDougald aren't long-term answers at safety.

The most important factor in the Buccaneers' long-term success, though, is Winston. He will have a full off-season to work with Evans, tight end Austin Seferian-Jenkins and his young offensive line. If he can make a similar leap to the one Andrew Luck made in his second season with the Colts, things could get *really* interesting for Koetter's offense.

Jaguars Keeping Bortles off the ground is a good place to start, but the key question for Jacksonville is coach Gus Bradley. When he was hired in 2013, it seemed like an ideal fit: an energetic force with the unflinching optimism necessary to deal with a massive rebuilding project.

This will be Bradley's fourth season, and now he needs to show some results. The Jags have come along on the offensive side, but Bradley's expertise is on defense. After finishing 26th in scoring defense in 2014, Jacksonville slid to 31st last year. Unless that trend is reversed, it wouldn't be a surprise if the Khan family looked elsewhere for a coach to entrust with the next phase of the Jaguars' turnaround. □



THE MAYAN DOOMSDAY calendar, which forecast the end of the world on Dec. 21, 2012, was off by a mere 1,137 days. The end arrived when a player with five career goals, and who was in the minors, was the MVP of the NHL All-Star Game, prompting teammates to hoist him on their shoulders and carry him off as if he had scored the winning touchdown in the 1956 Rose Bowl. Meanwhile, Sidney Crosby, the hockey household name whose career 1.33 points-per-game average ranks fifth in 99 years of league history, was not invited to last month's beauty pageant. Crosby had been entrusted with shining the klieg lights on America's fourth professional league for more than a decade, but ultimately John Scott, the friendly pugilist who was voted an All-Star captain by merry Internet pranksters, and whom the league tried to dissuade from darkening its spectacle, was the toast of Broadway, the name of the boulevard crammed with honky-tonks that runs past the arena in Nashville.

This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but with a Disney movie.

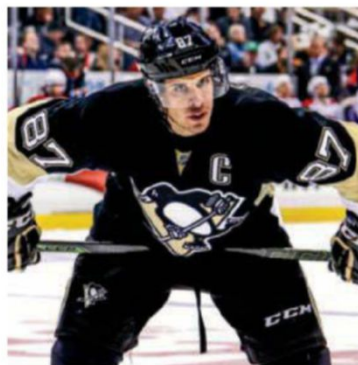
Curiously, Crosby and Scott have played in the same number of NHL All-Star Games. One. Crosby made his only appearance in 2007, in Dallas, which is more a matter of happenstance than lack of interest. (He was named to six teams, but injuries kept him out in '08, '09, '11, '12 and '15.) Theoretically Crosby could have been a Metropolitan Division replacement this year after Alex Ovechkin—the craggier face of the NHL who entered the league with Crosby in '05—canceled at the 11th hour, but asking him to fill in for his rival might have been more insulting than the initial snub. In any case the NHL didn't inquire. Not inviting Crosby to an All-Star Game, of course, is like telling Robert DeNiro to skip the Oscars because of *Dirty Grandpa*. Crosby was his politic public self, saying he was not playing well enough to merit inclusion when the NHL picked the teams in early January. The high road did not run through Tennessee.

At 28, Crosby is at the midpoint of his career. He is neither the prodigy who won a Stanley Cup in Pittsburgh in 2009 and scored Canada's golden goal at the 2010 Olympics, nor is he old enough to yell at the Oilers' Connor McDavid to get off his

On the one hand, Sidney Crosby is regularly praised as the game's best player (see his 2016 numbers). On the other, he's short on Cups and Gretzkyesque cultural clout—and there was that horrid late-2015 slump. As he enters hockey middle age, just who is Sid the Kid?

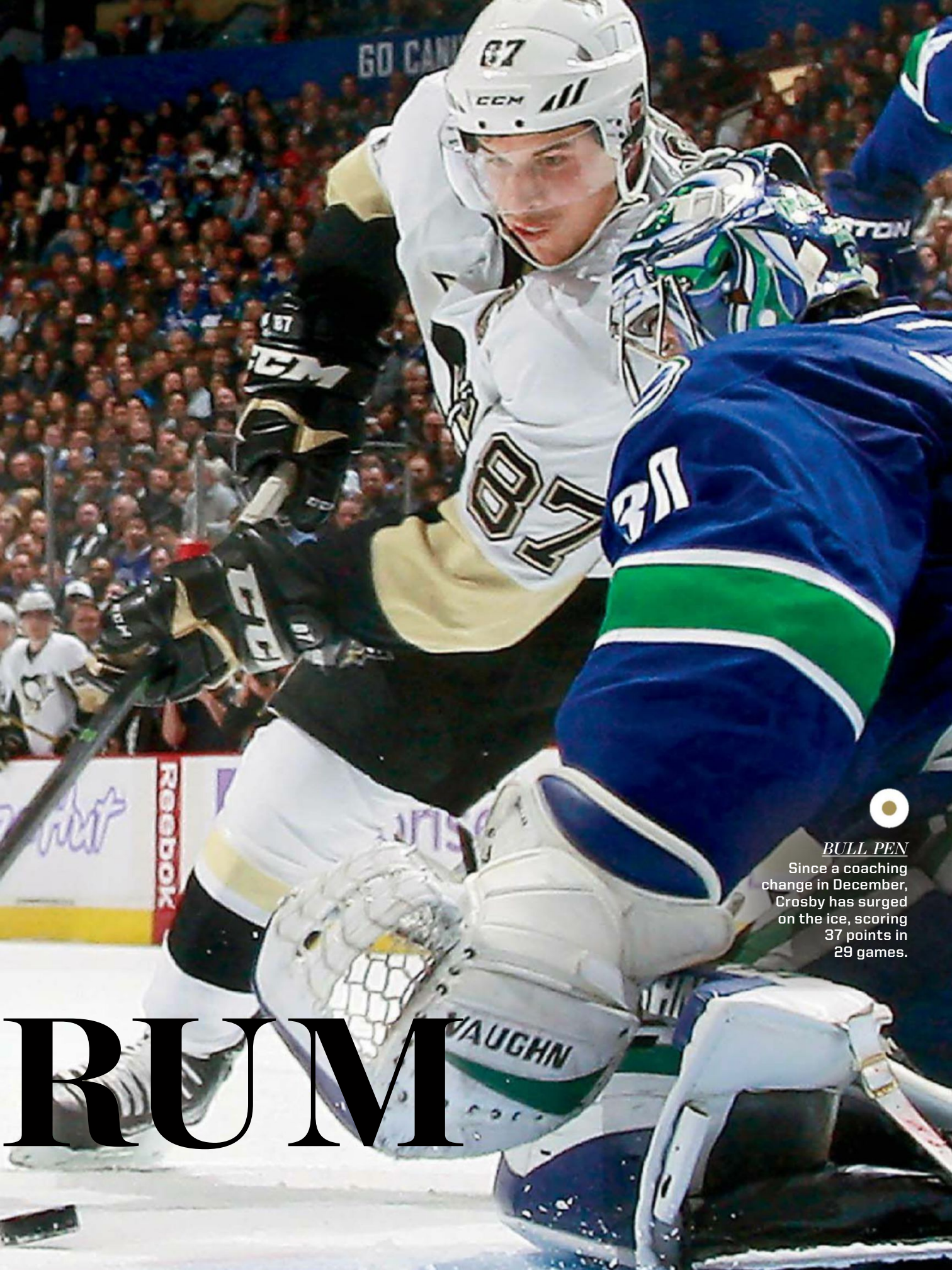
BY MICHAEL FARBER

Photograph by
Jeff Vinnick
NHL/Getty Images



MADE PAINÉ/AP

THE CROSBY CONUND



BULL PEN

Since a coaching change in December, Crosby has surged on the ice, scoring 37 points in 29 games.

RUM

SIDNEY CROSBY

lawn. After scoring 16 goals in 21 games since Jan. 1, Crosby might be, as Penguins defenseman Kris Letang avers, the best player in the NHL, but through Sunday he also trailed scoring leader Patrick Kane of the Blackhawks by 28 points. Crosby's season, indeed his career, is best described as a classic case of what A.J. Liebling of *The New Yorker* categorized as on-the-one-hand-this-and-the-other-hand-that. On the one hand, Crosby is a respected leader of his NHL and national teams, a diligent two-way player, a two-time Olympic champion. On the other hand, he carps too much to referees, goes through wingers like Kleenex, has been a playoff disappointment in recent years and was not the dominant forward at his two Olympic tournaments.

Here, play along at home:

On the one hand, Crosby was the youngest captain of a Stanley Cup winner. On the other hand, he has been the captain of only one Stanley Cup winner.

On the one hand, he has been an exemplar on the ice, a generational player and a worthy ambassador for the game. Like Wayne Gretzky. On the other hand, unlike Gretzky, he has not been a crossover star who is part of the daily sports conversation.

The faults, if you find them, are not in the star but in ourselves. The expectations were always overblown for a hockey savant the likes of which seem to come along in Canada every seven or so years (Orr, Lafleur, Gretzky, Lemieux, Lindros, Crosby, McDavid). Crosby has always been graded on the Gretzky Curve, which works against him as a player and as an NHL flag bearer. If Gretzky could peer around corners, Crosby is a hard-driving,

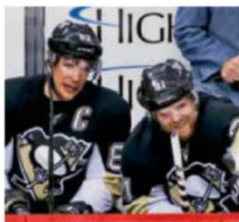


SIDE EFFECTS

Crosby's skill and hockey IQ make it difficult to find wingers who can hang with him; Kessel (below right, on bench), lasted two weeks.



“THIS MIGHT SOUND ODD,” GUERIN SAYS, “BUT I HONESTLY THINK HE’S MAYBE NOT HIS BEST NUMBERS. HIS



heavy-traffic player, more a workman than a visionary. And while Crosby has excited hockey fans, he hasn't necessarily inspired hockey converts. Now in his 11th season—it began with a five-game pointless

streak and has included a seven-game goal streak, each matching the longest of his career—he is an enigma in plain sight. His name comes with appreciative nods and also a “Yes, but. . .”

He is Crosby in the middle.

ON THE ONE HAND . . .

Sid the Kid. The nickname always had more rhyme than reason. No more profound than moon-spoon-June, it was a handle that severely shortchanged him. He could be petulant on the ice, but emotions never camouflaged an old soul. His original nickname was Darryl, hung on him after he recorded eight points in his first junior exhibition game, a nod to Maple Leafs captain Darryl Sittler, who in 1976 set the NHL single-game

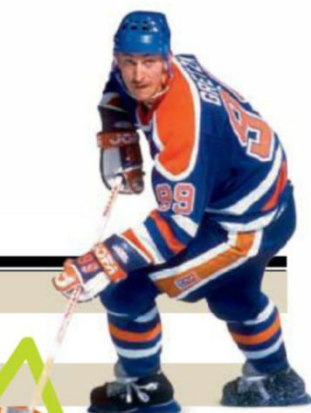
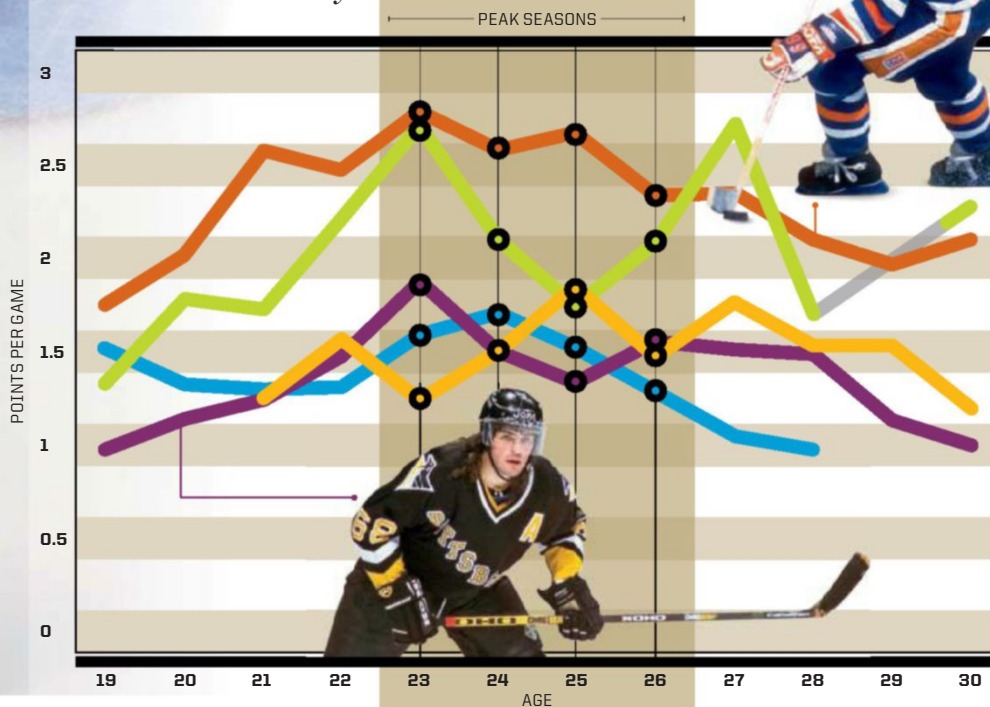
record of 10 points. “The guys in there,” Crosby said last month, gesturing across a corridor toward the Penguins’ dressing room, “they wouldn’t know who that is.”

He still looks boyish—clean-cheeked, impish grin—but he has begun his anticipated middle-aged slide, something that his two-month explosion surely delays but ultimately can’t deny. According to several studies, including an August *nerdhockey.com* survey, the sweet spot of a scorer’s career in the modern game generally falls between the ages of 23 and 26 (*chart*). Penguins co-owner Mario Lemieux had his career-high 85-goal season at 23; likewise, Crosby’s pinnacle might have been five years ago, when he scored 32 goals in 39 games and had a points streak of 25 games during the first half of the 2010–11 season. “That was the best I ever saw him,” says Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik, a teammate from ’05 to ’14. “Every game you just knew he’d do something amazing.” Then came Jan. 1, 2011, the Winter Classic, the NHL’s dark and stormy night. In a steady drizzle, Crosby was dinged by a fly-by, eminently unnecessary check thrown by Washington’s David Steckel under the Heinz

PRIMAL SURGE

How Sid's prime stacks up against the most prolific scorers in modern history

SIDNEY CROSBY ●
WAYNE GRETZKY ●
MARIO LEMIEUX ●
JAROMIR JAGR ●
MIKE BOSSY ●



Florida with five minutes left, Crosby lost a glove in a skirmish along the boards but managed to corral the puck and, with one bare hand and one gloved hand on his stick, whipped a pass into the slot to create a Letang goal. With less than 90 seconds remaining and the Penguins' net empty, Crosby deflected a shot-pass to force overtime. Finally, with Pittsburgh on the power play, he again set up Letang for the winner. Crosby had been magic. He made two points in the standings materialize out of thin air.

For his next trick, two nights later he scored on a pair of breakaways in a 6-2 demolition of surging Anaheim. His four points against the Ducks moved him into a tie for fifth in NHL scoring, 150 places higher than he had been on Nov. 17, when his professional obituaries were being typed.

Crosby has never stick-handled with the brio of Kane

or scored as naturally as Ovechkin. His has been a subtler brand of exceptionalism, born of outsized effort and impressive skating edge work and an unparalleled backhand and all the details that piled high, create a mountain of hockey excellence. On Jan. 2, against an accomplished Islanders penalty-killing unit, instead of a shot from above the right circle or a safe pass back to the point to Letang, he whipped the puck 50 feet on a diagonal, through the feet of an Islander, to Phil Kessel's tape along the left half boards. (Following the period Penguins assistant general manager Bill Guerin would say, "Whoa, the entertainment value on that was pretty high." This was not a compliment.) After breaking down the New York box, Crosby headed to the goal line, in position to tuck in a rebound when goalie Thomas Greiss fumbled Evgeni Malkin's shot.

"He's holding on to the puck more now," says Guerin, his right wing when Crosby scored 51 in 2009-10. "People don't always acknowledge it, but basically Sid's a power forward. Yeah, he's a center who makes plays, but maybe the best place for the puck to be is on his stick as he's driving to the net.

"His whole career he's been bombarded with pressure. With labels. He doesn't need labels. He doesn't need to be 'the best player in the world.' He just needs to be as good as

COMING INTO HIS BEST YEARS. BEST HOCKEY."

Field lights. Four nights later in Tampa Bay, defenseman Victor Hedman checked Crosby into the endboards. "That," says Chris Kunitz, Crosby's regular leftwinger, "might have changed everything." The severe concussion robbed him of a chunk of his prime—he missed the rest of that season and was limited to just 22 games in '11-12—but Crosby scuttled back. When he broke his jaw after being struck by a puck in late March 2013, he returned to have a subpar playoffs, failing to score in a conference finals sweep by the Bruins. Still, in 2013-14 he led the NHL with 104 points after having played in just 99 regular-season games during the previous three seasons.

Now he is on a run that mirrors the one that ended in the outdoor gloom. You have seen this movie. On Feb. 2, Crosby popped his head out, saw his shadow, and the hockey world was promised six more weeks of 2010. On Groundhog Day he scored three goals in a 6-5 win over the Senators, his ninth career hat trick and first since Oct. 12, 2013. Crosby scored in a subsequent loss at Tampa Bay and then reanimated the lifeless Penguins the following night. Trailing 2-0 at Atlantic Division-leading

SIDNEY CROSBY

he can be within our structure. This might sound odd, but I honestly think he's coming into his best years. Maybe not his best numbers. His best hockey."

ON THE OTHER HAND . . .

Crosby played 79 games in calendar year 2015. He had 73 points. This is fine in the neo-Dead Puck era (Stars winger Jamie Benn won last season's Art Ross Trophy with a mere 87 points, the fewest by a league leader in a full season since 1968), but it is more than four-tenths of a point below Crosby's career average. His even-strength points-per-60-minutes average is down 44.1% from his career high. Crosby entered the season with a 3.34 shot-per-game average, tied for eighth among all point-per-game centers since the 1979 NHL-WHA merger, but through 57 games he is averaging 2.98, the fourth consecutive season his total has dropped.

But goals and assists were never truly going to define a wonder like Crosby, were they? They would accumulate on their own, by-products of innate talent. Stanley Cups would define him. How many? How quickly? Gretzky won his first of four in his fifth season. Lemieux won his first of two in his seventh. Crosby beat them both, winning his first, and only so far, in his fourth year. Now he watches from the fringes, where he has seen Team Canada teammates Jonathan Toews lead Chicago to three in six years and Kings defenseman Drew Doughty spearhead two in the past four. Crosby has scored three goals in his past 18 playoff games, and the Penguins, a team larded with high-end talent, have not won any games beyond the second round, blowing a 3-1 lead to the Rangers in a 2014 conference semifinal.

"Sidney's played a lot of hockey," Gretzky says. "World Juniors. Under-18s, Olympics. Two Stanley Cup finals. Players are bigger, faster and stronger. You physically get beat up. Sidney Crosby has been through a lot. Simple as that." Gretzky adds that Crosby, Ovechkin and Steven Stamkos are the players he most enjoys watching, although in two years he expects McDavid to be the NHL's dominant player. McDavid will have just turned 21 then.

These are all hockey truths, of a kind. Mathematical. Ineluctable. Explicable.

The only thing that makes no sense is Crosby's 2015-16 start.

Crosby says he lost his confidence, which, if true, is a stunning admission for a player who from the moment he could tie his own skates was basically better than everyone else on the ice. It wasn't just that barren five-game streak to start the season: Crosby had only three goals in his first 19 games and six in his first 32. He was pressing, trying too hard to make plays for

his linemates, including Kessel, with whom he had no on-ice affinity, rather than using his famous hockey haunches and remarkable balance to bull his way into scoring areas. "You start thinking, What about that bounce? Or, How did that puck not go in?" Crosby says. "A puck goes off the post, which is normal, but you start to dwell on it. The fact that I wasn't scoring kind of compounded my situation."

Crosby was taking shots from everywhere—off the ice (WHAT IS WRONG WITH SIDNEY CROSBY? TSN.ca, Oct. 29) and on. His archnemesis, Columbus's Brandon Dubinsky, Lord Voldemort to Crosby's Harry Potter, broke his stick over the back of Crosby's neck as they jostled in front of the net on Nov. 27, an impromptu Bauer disectomy that felled Crosby. After another thanks-for-coming cross-check, this one to the base of Crosby's spine, Dubinsky skated casually to the penalty box, unmussed by the Penguins. No one rushed to the aid of Pittsburgh's captain. Crosby shrugged off the response to the incident, which earned Dubinsky a puny one-game suspension, saying an institutional thirst for vengeance has been bred out of the NHL in recent years. (Like a penguin, that excuse for his teammates, who say Crosby is well-liked in the dressing room, won't fly.)

"I think it reflected how the year was going, not fighting that extra mile for each other," Kunitz says of the Dubinsky incident. "The team was so indecisive for the first quarter, almost the first half, of the season. The team was more worried about getting a win than responding in what would be considered a hockey kind of way."

CROS-CHECK

Dubinsky (17) broke his stick over Crosby's neck on Nov. 27, and the Penguins did not immediately respond.



Crosby was not struggling in a vacuum. Kunitz was buried on the third line, and regular right wing Pascal Dupuis had to quit playing because of blood clots, commencing a familiar roundelay of Crosby wingers. Crosby is finicky. Because he has an exceptional hockey brain and barely conceals his annoyance when his line goes awry, finding suitable wingers has been a chronic issue, in Pittsburgh and on Team Canada. Kessel, the prize off-season acquisition from Toronto, lasted two weeks on Crosby's flank. (By contrast Gretzky and Lemieux could make 40-goal scorers out of Blair MacDonald and Warren Young, respectively.) "Sid can make guys uncomfortable," says Orpik, his former teammate. "When he's not happy about something, his body language is transparent. His emotions are genuine. Ecstatic or frustrated, there's no in-between with him." This is not merely an issue of



SID'S STAND

Crosby's second-period score against Tampa Bay on Feb. 5 extended his goal-scoring streak to five games.

“IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I DIDN’T FEEL LIKE I WAS IMPACTING THE GAME,” CROSBY SAYS. “NO IMPACT, WIN OR LOSE.”

his wingers. The Pittsburgh defense, especially when the brittle Letang and Olli Maatta are out of the lineup, is not particularly adept at moving the puck.

“I’ve had these stints before,” Crosby says. During an hour of conversation he will say *stints*, *stretches*, *tough times*, *adversity* and two or three other variations of the one word he will not utter: *slump*. “But [this] was the first time I didn’t feel like I was impacting the game. Before you could lean on [the fact that] you were out there the last minute of the game, or you were good defensively, or you had five or six chances, or you didn’t score but you drew a penalty. Not this time. No impact, win or lose.”

In early December, at breakfast with his agent, Pat Brisson, in Los Angeles, Crosby said, “I don’t know for sure when I’m going to get out of this. But when I do, I’ll be all the stronger for it.”

“Of course he was going to come out of it,” Kunitz says. “Too much skill. Too great a work ethic.”

And because no one has better prepared himself for greatness the past 15 years and because he was not going to shoot 4% for six months, the dark clouds began to dissipate—even before Mike Sullivan replaced Mike Johnston as coach on Dec. 12. (Crosby had 10 points in Johnston’s final 10 games.) He began shooting the puck more, and his shooting percentage slowly climbed into double digits, close to his 14.4% career average. The power play under Sullivan showed more hustle in retrieving pucks, and points began to flow. Under Johnston, Crosby was producing 1.6 points per 60 minutes at even strength. Under Sullivan his number rose to 2.34. The Shock! Horror! headlines—WILL SIDNEY CROSBY’S SLUMP MAKE HIM A WORLD CUP . . . FOURTH-LINER? (SI.com, Dec. 17)—now look like DEWEY BEATS TRUMAN.

AND SO . . .

Crosby still has years to change the plot. He may never score like Gretzky or lead like Mark Messier or be a godlike figure like Jean Béliveau, but a few more Stanley Cups or Olympic gold medals will sand off the corners and burnish a reputation to a lustrous glow. Of course, given the career arc

of elite scorers, can Crosby’s best hockey really lie ahead?

The facile comparison for a mid-career Crosby *virage* is Steve Yzerman, the six-time 100-point man who in 1994 at age 28, with prodding from Detroit coach Scotty Bowman, reinvented himself as a two-way center. The change was a boon to Yzerman’s image, but his transformation was also a pre-salary-cap luxury, because by the late 1990s the Red Wings, deep as the Mariana Trench, did not need 50 goals from him. The Penguins are different. They have \$32.25 million in cap space invested in Crosby, Malkin, Kessel and Letang. Since 2014 former GM Ray Shero and current GM Jim Rutherford have sacrificed first-round draft choices for the departed Jarome Iginla, the traded David Perron (a combined 21 goals in 99 Pittsburgh games) and Kessel (19 goals), mortgaging the future for modest returns.

The Penguins are in salary-cap prison—orange is the new black-and-gold—but the overriding economic principle in Crosby’s case is opportunity cost. Crosby envisions himself as a career one-franchise guy, but he is spending precious years chasing a narrative-altering Cup on a fringe playoff team that needs a big-minute, shutdown defenseman and more jam from its bottom six forwards. Crosby demurs. “Championship teams are built over time,” he says. He adds that the Penguins “have some good pieces.”

“I learned a lot about myself this season,” he says, eyes on a game playing on a nearby TV. “If I’m not scoring, can I do other things well? Are you going to be good defensively? Are you going to have a good attitude? Are you going to try to drag everyone down with you? Are you going to make excuses and give up, or are you going to find ways to make yourself better for everyone else?”

So did you like what you learned?

Crosby lowers his eyes from the screen. “Yeah,” he says, fixing his gaze. “I did.” □



GLOVE STORY,



+ COLLEGE BASKETBALL



FOR TWO WEEKS over the past two summers the father, the son and the basketball trainer took over the gym of a community college in Oakland's eastern hills. Every morning the father sat in a folding chair behind the royal blue baseline, watching the son fly up and down the court as the trainer put him through one drill after another, barely a breath between each. Medicine ball slides gave way to diagonal backpedaling, punctuated by a drive to the basket. A mock fast break one way set up a push toward a transition jumper in the other. The effect was a blurring procession of concussive dribbles, hard grunts and swooshing nets until the father called a halt. "Hold up, man!" Gary Payton would shout in the Merritt College gym. "He's gotta do it again." Then the son, Gary II, would repeat the drill with an ardor and urgency worthy of the hoops culture that shaped the father.

Gary Payton grew up in East Oakland. As a boy, that meant concrete schoolyards on gang-ruled turf; at Skyline High it meant thriving in the rowdy gyms of the Oakland Athletic League, which often needed a police presence to keep order. Learning to play point guard in those environments instilled a ferocity in Payton that drove him so far—to nine NBA All-Star Games, nine figures in career earnings and a Hall of Fame enshrinement—that he would raise Gary II in a different world. Says the 47-year-old Payton, "He always had a silver spoon in his mouth because of me."

"Gary wanted him to come home and smell some of that inner-city air," says the trainer, former Nuggets assistant Chris Farr, "to see if he could turn into what we think he could turn into."

That air carried the father to stardom at Oregon State, where he was the Pac-10's defensive player of the year in 1987 and the overall POY in '90, and where now the son is taking his own turn as leading man. A senior, Gary II is a 6' 3" point guard of such superb versatility—15.9 points, 7.6 rebounds, 5.3 assists and 2.5 steals per game at week's end—that he remains in the thick of the Pac-12 player of the year race despite the Beavers' eighth-place standing. "He's just as impactful as anybody else," says Pac-12 Network analyst Lamar Hurd. "And he's the most indispensable of any guy on any team."

A TIMELY
ULTIMATUM ISSUED
BY HIS HALL OF FAME
FATHER HELPED
GARY PAYTON II
DEVELOP INTO AN NBA
PROSPECT, PLAYING
THE SAME POSITION
AS HIS DAD AND
STARRING AT
HIS ALMA MATER

BY DAN GREENE

Photograph by
Kohjiro Kinno for Sports Illustrated

PART II

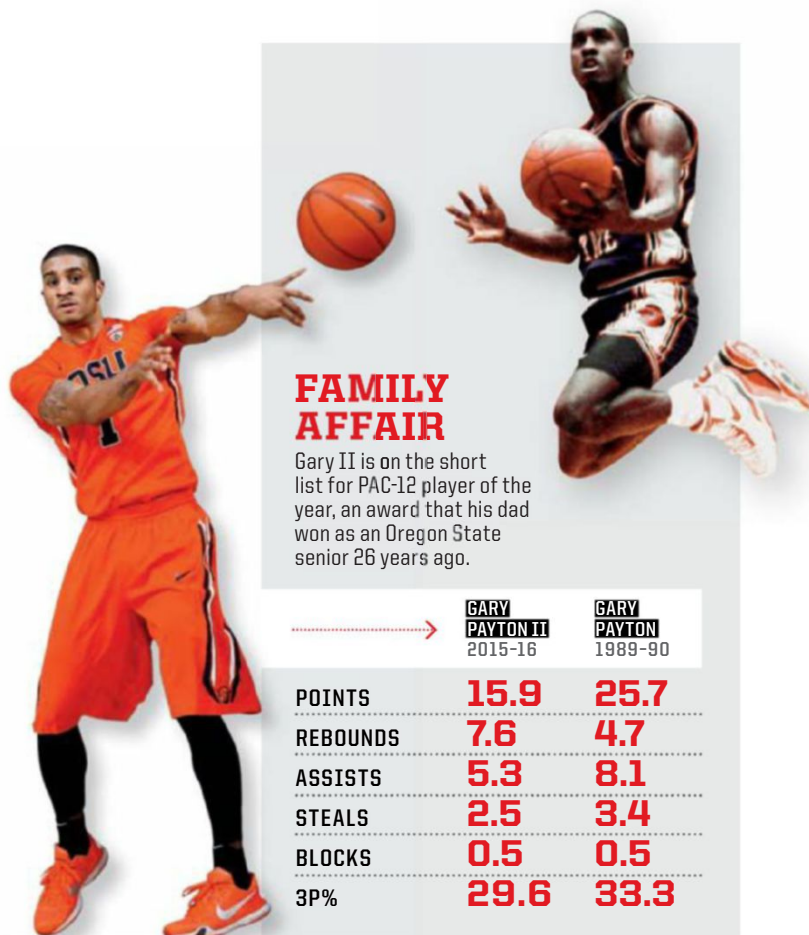
Despite the parallels of role and school Gary II is no clone. The father was a prolific passer who chipped in on the boards; the son's defensive rebound rate (17.5%) ranks second among conference guards. Both are distinguished thieves—the father remains Oregon State's career steals leader—but the elder Payton describes his son as “more of a gambler,” a passing-lane pest in coach Wayne Tinkle's frequent zones. And while the father threw down on occasion, the son's dunks—like his soaring, driving slam from the right block against Kansas on Dec. 12, or his transition posterization of Oregon's 6' 10" Chris Boucher on Jan. 3—are staples of the college hoops Twitterverse. “I don't know where he gets that from,” says the elder Payton, who's 6' 4". “I'm like, Is that my son?”

Yet a few years ago the need for any comparison seemed unlikely. “His journey was long,” Gary II's mother, Monique Payton, says of her middle child. “He had to crawl his way.” And for much of his youth, being the son of Gary Payton made Gary II reluctant to embark on the journey at all.

IF GARY PAYTON was the king of Seattle's KeyArena in the 1990s, Gary II was its prince. As a grade-schooler he had free rein of its corridors, giggling past guards who knew him by name. He rebounded during the SuperSonics' shootarounds, then distributed towels and water on their bench. In the visitors' locker room he hobnobbed with Vince Carter and Kevin Garnett. He was even there—alongside a hired violinist and Squatch, the team's hirsute mascot—when his parents were engaged during an off-hours dinner at midcourt. “KeyArena is where I grew up,” Gary II says. “It's pretty much my home.”

On the court Gary II watched his father—the Glove—mean-mug while smothering opponents, talking so much trash that a teammate once said Payton would only quiet down “about two months after he's dead.” At home he was a no-nonsense stickler, an heir to his own father's Mr. Mean nickname. Gary II, who preferred hugs to confrontation, took after Monique, whose friends called him her little twin. “We're lovers, not fighters,” she says.

Despite the NBA immersion, basketball did not come naturally to Gary II. Classmates were harsh when he failed to star in pickup games, needling him about his father and asking if he were adopted. “That kind of pushed me away from the game,” he says. He continued to play but preferred baseball and football and even tried water polo. He gravitated to hobbies like dirt-biking and paintball. He was interested in marine biology.



FAMILY AFFAIR

Gary II is on the short list for PAC-12 player of the year, an award that his dad won as an Oregon State senior 26 years ago.

	GARY PAYTON II 2015-16	GARY PAYTON 1989-90
POINTS	15.9	25.7
REBOUNDS	7.6	4.7
ASSISTS	5.3	8.1
STEALS	2.5	3.4
BLOCKS	0.5	0.5
3P%	29.6	33.3

By ninth grade, with his father's playing career winding down and the family settled in Las Vegas, Gary II was a gawky benchwarmer on his AAU team. He and his father rarely discussed hoops and almost never the son's play. When Gary would attend Gary II's games, he barked advice so vehemently that his son asked him to stop coming. “I didn't know how to handle it,” Gary II says. “I would go back and tell my mom that I didn't want to play anymore.” He made the freshman team at Spring Valley High, then jayvee as a sophomore, but didn't enjoy himself. “I just played because my friends played,” Gary II says. “I was just out there.”

Even after making varsity his junior year, little changed. When his father attended one early-season game, he was appalled to see his son coasting on the court. He stood up and walked out. “I didn't see the passion,” says the elder Payton. “He didn't look like he was interested, so I said, Well, I'm not interested.”

At home a few days later, the Payton patriarch sat Gary II down and delivered an ultimatum: If he was going to attend college, he would need to earn a scholarship. And—his father continued—he wasn't a good enough player to do so. “It kind of hurt,” says Gary II, “but it was a reality check.” Later that week, as he mulled over the conversation, a new outlook took hold. “I said, Why not?” Gary II says. “Let's try it his way and work out and see where it takes us.”

As his junior season progressed, Gary II began putting in extra practice. He improved his footwork and fundamentals with Darrel Jordan, a family friend who coached the youngest Payton brother, Julian, in AAU. By the time Spring Valley made the state playoffs, Gary II was

an emerging sixth man supporting an all-senior lineup. “His instincts for the game were second to none,” says Phil McAlister, then Spring Valley’s coach. “He was turning into a serious player.”

The following summer, while playing for an AAU team of Jordan’s, Payton chased morning conditioning drills with afternoon practices and nightly shooting sessions. He played in adult leagues at the Tarkanian Basketball Academy. He lifted weights, surprising himself with his newfound dunking ability. He wolfed down peanut-butter sandwiches to pack on pounds.

“He just blossomed,” McAlister says. “He took ownership of his game and who he was, and became an incredible player. He grew, and all of a sudden he was jumping out of the gym.” The next winter Gary II defended opposing big men while starring alongside four underclass guards. “You could count on 15 points and 10 boards every night,” adds McAlister. “He was the straw that stirred our drink, no doubt about it.”

Still, few colleges took notice. After a year at Westwind Prep in Phoenix, where he grew to 6' 3", Payton enrolled at Salt Lake Community College, a school with more than 30,000 students and a juco program regularly among the best in the Scenic West conference. Among his teammates were JuWan Buchanan (nephew of his father’s Seattle running mate, Shawn Kemp) and Tyrell Corbin (son of then Jazz coach Tyrone).

But at first Gary II played down his NBA pedigree. He asked to be called Dwayne, his middle name, until a P.A. announcer didn’t get the memo. He winced when local media called him the Mitten.

The more his game improved, the more comfortable he got in his own skin. He dissected his play with his father, who gave tips for exploiting the seams of a defense and implored him to ramp up his aggressiveness as a scorer. He was happy when his father would make one of his 10 or so trips to Bruin Arena. On the road, when fans would heckle—“Your dad never played juco!”—he would laugh.

As a freshman Payton started as a wing, displaying enough promise that D-I recruiters blew up his phone. Each pitch hit a familiar note: *Come here and build your own legacy*. In October of his sophomore season, Payton was ready to commit to St. Mary’s until he took a visit to Oregon State, where he attended a football game and tailgated with then coach Craig Robinson. Some friends and family warned him

about the pressures that would await in Corvallis. His parents, who had divorced a few years earlier, told him to go wherever he would be happiest.

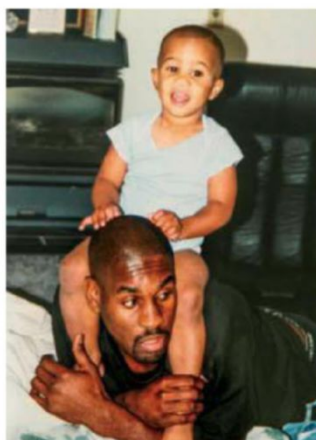
Back in Salt Lake, Gary II realized he wanted the challenge of playing at his dad’s alma mater. He composed a long text message to his family explaining his decision. He signed it, “Go Beavs.” Lying in bed at his home in Los Angeles, his father’s eyes welled with pride.

TWENTY MINUTES after the final horn, Gill Coliseum’s roar has died down following a wild, 71–69 win over Utah on Feb. 4. Gary Payton II was the game’s star, with 20 points, six rebounds and seven assists, including setting up the go-ahead basket with 13 seconds left. His father spent the night first as a demonstrative courtside spectator, challenging officials and shouting pointers, then slipping back into his role as returning hero, posing for photos with orange-clad undergrads and well-wishers. “It’s a great feeling—it’s all in here,” he says, tapping his chest, when asked about the pride he takes in his son’s success. “Everybody says I don’t ever smile. I don’t wanna smile until something’s accomplished.”

Twenty-six years have passed since Payton last played in Corvallis, a gap that doubles as the Beavers’ NCAA tournament drought. They have had just three winning seasons in that span, one of which came last year, a 17–14 finish in the first season for Gary II and Tinkle. Hailed by Robinson as a “glue guy” when he committed, Gary II instead became the team’s centerpiece, earning Pac-12 defensive player of the year honors and leading the nation in steal percentage (5.5%; this year his 4.2% ranks 14th). By season’s end he was receiving buzz as a possible second-round NBA draft pick.

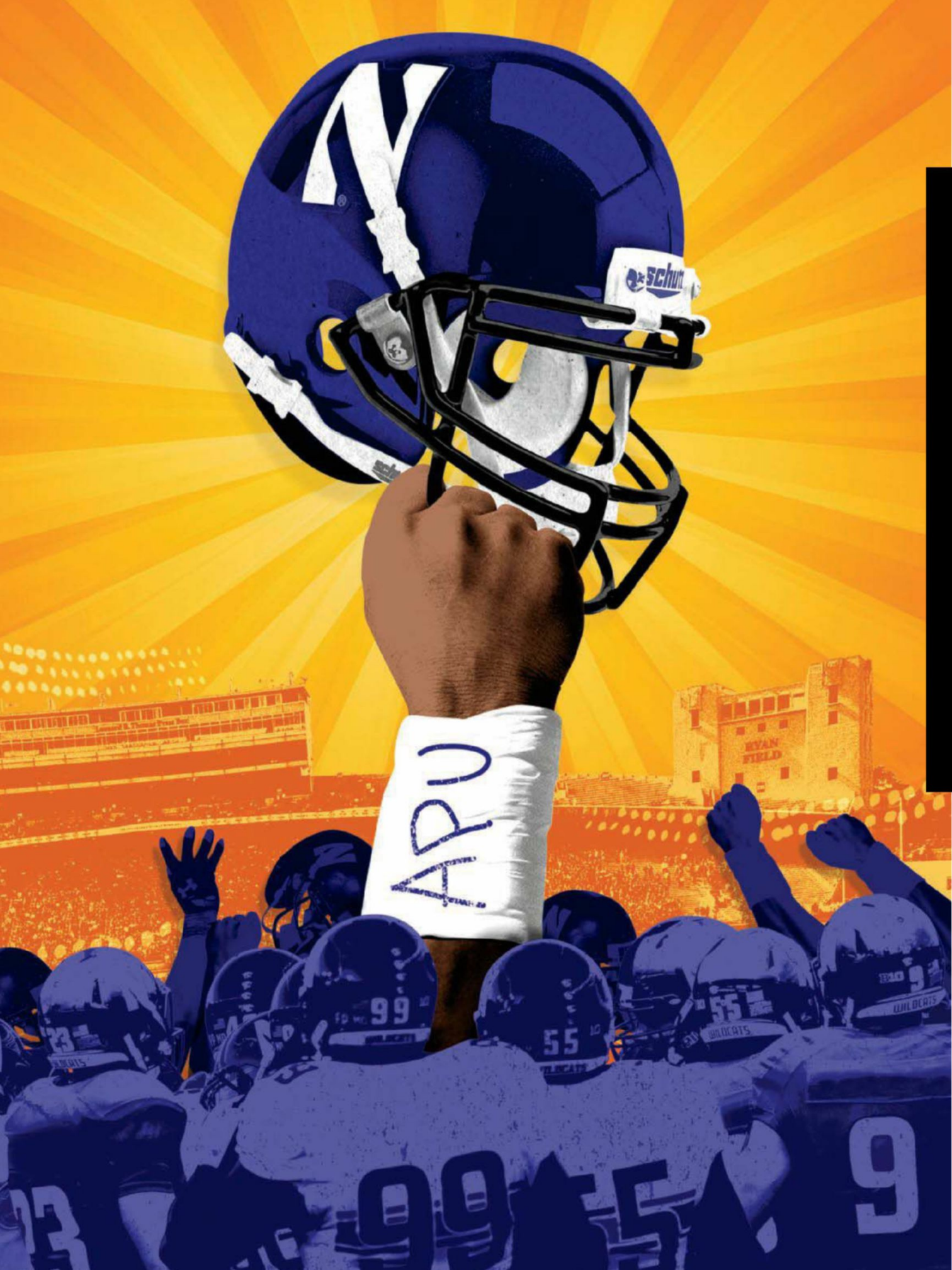
He returned to school in part to try to lead Oregon State to the Big Dance, a task that will likely require the 15–10 team to make a deep run in the conference tournament. A banner in Gill displays a monochrome image from an era where such bids were regular: the elder Payton, neck draped in a trimmed net, wearing a told-you-so stare. During a postpractice interview Gary II’s eyes repeatedly wander in its direction; another larger-than-life likeness of his father, open-mouthed and dribbling with his right hand like an inverted NBA logo, is painted among a mural of Beavers greats on an adjacent wall. “He’s everywhere in this town,” Gary II says.

And when the son sees the father, he looks up, not away. □



LIVING WITH A LEGEND

The bond between father and son wasn’t built on hoops until Gary II decided to see how good he could be.

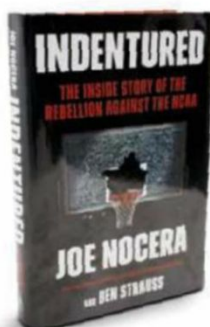


FATE of the UNION

When a former UCLA linebacker and a Northwestern quarterback joined forces to start a labor movement among college athletes, they rattled the NCAA to its very foundation

BY JOE NOCERA AND BEN STRAUSS

Illustration by
John Ritter for Sports Illustrated



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✕ **ON A BELOW-ZERO** morning in January 2014, Ramogi Huma and Tim Waters walked into the National Labor Relations Board office on West Adams Street in downtown Chicago. Huma, a former UCLA linebacker and a lifelong resident of Southern California, had bought his first winter coat before making the trip, but he barely noticed the cold. He was carrying a package that represented something he and Waters, the director of the United Steelworkers Political Action Committee, had been thinking about for the last year. It contained union cards signed by almost all of the football players at a Big Ten university.

“We’re here to unionize the Northwestern football team,” said Huma, the founder and president of the National College Players Association (NCPA), which puts public pressure on the NCAA to expand the rights and benefits of athletes. The NLRB clerk did a double take.

Fifteen miles away, on Northwestern’s campus in Evanston, Kain Colter sat in a meeting with his coach, Pat Fitzgerald. Colter, then 21, had been Northwestern’s starting quarterback for the past two seasons. He was a team captain and in 2013 had piloted the Wildcats to a Gator Bowl victory, Northwestern’s first bowl win in 64 years. Fitzgerald, for his part, was an icon on campus, a former All-America linebacker who had led the 1995 Northwestern team to the Rose Bowl.

Colter told his coach that he believed it was important to change college sports, that the power structure marginalized players and that he had deep concerns about issues such as long-term health care for college athletes. The team had signed union cards, he said, which were being filed as they spoke. Fitzgerald said, “I’m proud of you guys for doing this. I think it’s a great cause, and you’re bringing up great points.” But, according to Colter, the coach also said that before he could take a public position, he had to see how the school wanted to handle it. (Fitzgerald denies saying this.)

Later that morning Huma and Colter held a press conference at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Chicago. Northwestern players sought employee status under the law, they said, and with it the ability to bargain collectively through a new entity that Huma and Colter had formed the same day: the College Athletes Players Association (CAPA). In front of TV cameras and a room full of reporters, Colter said, “The current model resembles a dictatorship, where the NCAA places these rules and regulations on these students without their input or without their negotiation.”

Colter continued, “The NFL has the NFLPA, the NBA has the NBAPA, and now college athletes have the College Athletes Players Association.”

WHEN RAMOGI HUMA was a freshman at UCLA, in 1995, one of his teammates, All-America linebacker Donnie Edwards, told a local radio station that he didn’t have enough money to buy food. A few days later an agent left a bag of groceries worth about \$150 on Edwards’s doorstep. When the NCAA found out, Edwards, who would go on to have a long and successful pro career, was suspended for one game. The suspension had a profound impact on Huma: UCLA could sell Edwards’s jersey in the campus bookstore for \$50, but he couldn’t afford dinner?

The summer after Huma’s freshman year, his coaches recommended that he participate in summer workouts with the team but also told him that because the workouts were voluntary and didn’t occur during the

school year, NCAA rules prohibited UCLA from providing health insurance. Huma was stunned. "It was very clear that something wasn't right," he says.

Unlike most college athletes, Huma didn't just let that thought pass. As a sophomore he founded the Collegiate Athletes Coalition, which in the mid-2000s would become the NCPA. Over the next decade Huma built an organization with members at more than 150 schools. He even persuaded the United Steelworkers to join his cause, leading *The Wall Street Journal* to christen him the "Norma Rae of jocks."

Huma's future partner in the Northwestern unionization drive, Colter, grew up in Boulder, Colo., with sports in his blood. His uncle Cleveland Colter was an All-America safety at Southern Cal in 1988. Kain's dad, Spencer, was a safety on Colorado's '90 national championship team and went on to coach high school football.

At 6' 1", Kain was undersized for a quarterback, but he had quickness and smarts. As a junior he was recruited by Texas Christian, Northwestern and Stanford, among other schools. He committed to Stanford. "That was my dream school," he says. "I loved the academics, loved Palo Alto."

But early in his senior season Kain suffered a torn labrum while reaching for a fumble. He tried to play through the pain, but his performance suffered. The letters and phone calls from Stanford's coaches slowed to a trickle, and eventually the school told him he wouldn't be accepted. Crushed, he frantically looked for another scholarship. Northwestern was still in the market for a quarterback, so Kain headed east to the Big Ten.

Colter spent his freshman season on the bench, redshirting. Then, late in the year, starting quarterback Dan Persa ruptured his Achilles tendon. Fitzgerald asked if Colter would step in and play—in other words, sacrifice a full year of eligibility for the three remaining games. Colter agreed, and on Jan. 1, 2011, he had his breakout moment in the TicketCity Bowl, rushing for two touchdowns in a 45–38 loss to Texas Tech.

Colter had arrived in Evanston with two dreams: to be an NFL quarterback and, after his playing days, a doctor. He began on a premed track, but as a quarterback on scholarship he needed to be at every minute of practice, and team activities conflicted with the science classes he needed. He fell behind and pushed the classes to the summer before finally switching his major to psychology. "I had a chance to be a pro football player or a doctor," he says, "but I couldn't do both."

There were other aspects of college football life that bothered Colter. Stipend checks for off-campus living, which were part of his scholarship, were difficult to stretch, especially because the team mandated that players buy meals from the athletic department. He spoke to friends and former high school teammates at other schools who were also struggling financially. Many of them, unlike Colter at Northwestern, were also concerned about the lack of academic support they received.

Colter's biggest concern, however, was medical care. Northwestern and other athletic departments provided a health policy for players—but usually it was only a supplement to a player's primary insurance, provided by his or her parents. If the parents couldn't afford it, the athlete might have to pay out of pocket for the school's health plan. Once players left school, they also had few guarantees of health coverage for injuries they had sustained on the field.

Colter's uncle Cleveland had been considered a shoo-in to jump to the NFL from USC—until he suffered a severe knee injury. He never fully recovered. Not only was Cleveland not drafted, but he also didn't graduate. Now he runs a catering business, and his knee still bothers him. "Think

SEEKING CAPITAL GAINS

Colter (below and far right) and Huma came to D.C. for the NLRB hearing in 2014, hoping to build on the ruling rendered in Chicago.



about a 20-year-old kid who's got all this pressure from his family—he's getting ready to be drafted in the first round, and he tears his knee up," Kain says. "You're thinking, I've been working my whole life for one thing, and now it's out the window."

In the summer of 2013, Colter took a seminar called Field Studies in the Modern Workplace. A field trip to a Chicago steel mill sparked a discussion about why blue-collar workers had unionized. One rationale was health and safety protection. Colter offered a parallel to college football players. "In the NFL, the NBA and baseball, the unions help protect the players," he said. "And without them, players wouldn't be treated fairly."

Around the same time, Colter met Tregg Duerson, a graduate of Northwestern's business school whose father, Dave, had played 11 years in the NFL. Dave Duerson killed himself in 2011, at age 50, with a gunshot to the chest. He was later found to have chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), presumably caused by repeated hits to the head. Tregg helped Colter understand the dangers of football well beyond his uncle's story.

Colter wrote a paper for his seminar describing the NCAA as a cartel and raising the possibility of a union. He also searched the Internet—"Can college players have a union?"—and found Huma's NCPA. In the comments box Colter shared his frustrations and ideas. He hit SEND. "I really didn't think I was going to hear back," he says.

WHEN THE Steelworkers agreed to back Huma in 2001, unionization was a step that he and Waters were reluctant to take. Huma continued to complain that athletic scholarships did not cover the full cost of attending college and that players saw next to none of the spoils of a college sports industry that generated billions of dollars. In



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2012 he worked on a study with Drexel professor Ellen Staurowsky that found the average scholarship fell short of what top-division football players needed by more than \$3,000 a year, while more than 80% of athletes playing football on "full scholarship" lived below the poverty line. What's more, the study found that if revenues were shared among players and owners as in pro sports, each Division I football player would be worth \$137,357 per year.

Huma also helped end the NCAA's ban on multiyear scholarships by speaking to the Justice Department. Not long after Justice officials questioned the NCAA about the policy, schools were given the option of offering four-year scholarships that were not contingent on a coach's approval after each season.

But even Huma's successes could be bittersweet. In the fall of 2012, California governor Jerry Brown signed a law called the Student Athlete Bill of Rights, which provided new scholarship and health protections for players in the state's biggest college sports programs, including mandated health coverage for two years beyond eligibility. But it had passed the legislature only after it was stripped of other important provisions, such as one allowing players to transfer and compete for their new school right away.

"We wanted the NCAA to listen, to come to the table with us," Huma says. But the NCAA did neither, and by the time Colter came calling, Huma was ready for bigger and bolder action, due to new publicity about an old problem: concussions.

In April 2010 the NCAA held its first-ever concussion summit, during which it released a survey of athletic trainers. The results were troubling. Less than 50% of schools required a physician to see all athletes who suffered concussions; 39% had no guidelines on how long athletes should sit out before returning to play; nearly half said they allowed athletes to return to play in the same game in which they suffered a concussion. Finally the NCAA was moved to act—barely. It mandated that universities develop their own concussion protocols, but it did nothing to monitor them. Was anyone ever disciplined for not following safety rules? "Not to my knowledge," David Klossner, the NCAA's director of health and safety, later said.

The importance of stronger safety protocols only became clearer in the ensuing months. Owen Thomas, a junior lineman at Penn, banged himself

in his off-campus apartment that same April. Five months later doctors examined his brain and found evidence of early stages of CTE. In 2011, Adrian Arrington, a former safety at Eastern Illinois, sued the NCAA over its lack of concussion policies. Arrington had sustained five concussions during his career, some severe enough that he didn't immediately recognize his parents afterward. By the time he was 27, Arrington was on welfare and couldn't hold a job because of seizures so violent that during one, he tore his rotator cuff. (In December '13 the NCAA would make a jaw-dropping legal argument in filings on a wrongful-death suit brought by the family of Derek Sheely, a former Division III football player at Frostburg [Md.] State. Sheely collapsed after repeated blows to the head during a preseason drill in '11. He died six days later. "The NCAA denies that it has a legal duty to protect student-athletes," the filing read.)

Huma, desperate for a way to bring attention to college football's concussion crisis, traveled to Miami Gardens, Fla., for the Jan. 7, 2013, BCS championship game between Alabama and Notre Dame. Along with Morgan Thomas, Owen's brother, he attempted to call a press conference at the media hotel, but hotel staff wouldn't allow it—college football officials didn't want him there. "It was a breaking point," Huma says. "When we couldn't talk about concussions, we had to change course."

Later that year Huma finally met with the NCAA's new chief medical officer, Brian Hainline, to talk about concussions and player safety. Hainline said that he alone couldn't impose new safety regulations; they had to come from the membership.

HUMA CALLED Colter within an hour of receiving the player's email. The first words out of Colter's mouth were, "College athletes need a union." *Union* was a word Huma had been avoiding for nearly 15 years. For starters, his backer on the Steelworkers, Waters, was opposed to it, not least because of the huge undertaking it would entail, from hiring lawyers to organizing to finding the right player to lead the charge. Waters had also never thought unionizing would be necessary. "College sports, to me, was an issue of, Lift up the rock and see what's underneath," he says. "Once people saw what was really going on, it wasn't going to take a union to change it." But the rock was up, and nothing had happened.

Colter's arrival before the 2013 season helped change the dynamics at the NCPA, which had long been a one-man operation. Now Huma had a fellow football player as a copilot. Colter, a three-time member of the Big Ten's All-Academic team, was articulate, persuasive and full of energy. As Waters says, "Kain was like the second coming of Ramogi."

The quarterback joined a conference call Huma had arranged a few times a month with a handful of other players around the country. Colter heard them talk about the same things he noticed: too-small stipend checks, lack of medical coverage, watching teammates and friends fail to graduate. He soon recruited a Northwestern teammate to participate in the calls and pressed Huma and Waters to begin moving on a union. "He wanted everything to be bigger, to be more public," Waters says. "He always wanted to know what was next."

That fall Huma and the athletes on the conference calls devised a way to publicize their concerns: Players would write APU, for All Players United, on their wrist tape during games one Saturday in a show of solidarity. Colter and several Northwestern teammates displayed the acronym. So did Georgia Tech quarterback Vad Lee and several Georgia offensive linemen. Waters watched Northwestern play Maine that afternoon in a game televised by the Big Ten Network. When the camera focused on Colter, Waters took a photo with his phone, then zoomed in on the APU. He tweeted the image with the caption, "Northwestern Star QB (Colter) wears #APU logo on both wrists to join @NCPANOW national player solidarity action today."

The response to the APU protest was predictable. Fitzgerald told Colter that it should have been discussed within the team beforehand. But Colter says that when he asked if he could address the team about the APU movement, the coach said no. (Fitzgerald says Colter never asked.)

Later that fall Waters had come around; he quietly floated a college players' union to Steelworkers leaders and other top labor minds. Colter was changing the NCPA. "You have to be born with this, to be a leader," Waters says. "Here he was, the real deal. This wasn't a third-string safety; this was a quarterback of a Big Ten team."

Waters and Huma flew to Evanston later that fall, and Waters gave Colter a crash course on organized labor. As a private university, Northwestern was governed not by state law but by the National Labor Relations Board. Thirty percent of the team had to sign cards to allow a vote on unionization to go forward, and then, after Northwestern refused to recognize the validity of such a vote—a near certainty—there would be a public hearing before the regional NLRB. The Steelworkers would handle legal questions. They would look into who was eligible and what an employee designation would mean for players. Colter, meanwhile, would organize the team.

Colter had to spread the word among his teammates slowly, without alerting the coaches. Some players had questions about employee status—would they be able to play against other teams of nonemployees? But most had many of the same gripes Colter did and agreed that, coming from a Big Ten school, they were in a unique position to put pressure on the NCAA. "Nobody said, 'This is crazy. Screw you,'" Colter says.

Huma and Colter organized a series of conference calls with the handful of players who were the most enthusiastic about organizing. The union cards, they decided, would wait until after the football

ALUMNI AND FORMER TEAMMATES WANTED TO KNOW WHY COLTER WAS KILLING THE PROGRAM.



season. To present the cards to the team, Colter reserved a classroom for Sunday, Jan. 26. Northwestern players received texts about an "urgent players-only meeting," and they arrived in groups of 20 throughout the afternoon.

Colter addressed each group, explaining how he had gotten involved in the players' rights movement. He stressed the gravity of the moment. This would be covered by ESPN and CNN, he said. He then introduced Huma, who talked about the NCPA, the Steelworkers' involvement and the cost-of-attendance issue while promising that the union would not affect other sports on campus. He had a packet of FAQs and their answers for each player. Huma guaranteed total confidentiality for everyone who participated.

Colter finished the pitch with a personal story. He played much of his senior season on injured ankle cartilage, and as he trained that winter for the NFL draft, the injury continued to bother him. But when he asked the school to pay for an MRI, it declined. He paid for it himself and found he needed ankle surgery. Only then did Northwestern offer to reimburse him and find a doctor to operate. (Northwestern says Colter failed to properly notify the school about the MRI, and once the needed paperwork was filed, the school was willing to pay for the procedure.)

Players had plenty of questions. Would they have to pay union dues? Huma assured them they would not. Others asked about their popular coach. Colter said he would talk to Fitzgerald. Each group was given union cards. Almost every player signed. The organizers looked at one another, wide-eyed. "We knew we made history," Colter says.



MIXED REVIEWS

Fitzgerald (left) and Phillips (top) praised their players' passion but disagreed with their cause.

TWO DAYS later Huma turned in the cards. It was national news, just as Colter had predicted. And while not every commentator approved of the idea of a college athletes' union, Colter drew praise for raising the issues of health care and NCAA intransigence. Northwestern athletic director Jim Phillips denounced collective bargaining but said, "We love and are proud of our students. Northwestern teaches them to be leaders and independent thinkers who will make a positive impact. . . . Today's action demonstrates that they are doing so." Fitzgerald tweeted, "Kain and our student-athletes have followed their beliefs with great passion and courage. I'm incredibly proud of our young men! GO CATS!"

Not surprisingly, Northwestern refused to recognize the players as employees, so a hearing before the regional NLRB in Chicago was scheduled for February. An employee, under the National Labor Relations Act as well as Supreme Court precedent, is an individual who performs services for another, under the control of another, for compensation or payment. The NLRB had dealt with a similar case in 2004, when it ruled that Brown University graduate teaching assistants were not employees because they were primarily students. The Steelworkers were unconcerned with that precedent, however. There was little reason, Waters thought, that the players could not be both students and employees.

The Steelworkers had spent months preparing arguments and lined up some legal heavyweights. John Adam had argued more than a hundred cases before the labor board. His hearing partner was Gary Kohlman, a D.C. labor lawyer and a pit bull of a cross-examiner. The gist of CAPA's case was simple: The players were already employees because they were paid with a scholarship

that the school valued as high as \$76,000. In exchange, the players were expected to put in huge amounts of work with the football team under the strict control of their coaches, who were effectively their bosses. And if they did not follow the rules, they could lose their scholarships.

Colter, who was completing his final two courses while rehabbing his injured ankle and training for the draft in Bradenton, Fla., flew in to testify first. He said he sometimes spent 50 or 60 hours a week with the team, and he needed the team's approval to do mundane things such as move out of the dorm into an off-campus apartment.

Adam walked Colter through the itinerary for the Wildcats' Nov. 10, 2012, game at Michigan. With more than 10 hours of travel, a four-hour football game and hours more of meetings and team meals, the trip required nearly 24 hours with the team, which seemed to exceed NCAA's limit on sports participation to 20 hours each week. But the NCAA, it turned out, had a loophole in this arithmetic: Time related to a game event—travel, play, team meetings and everything else—counted for only three hours against the cap.

When announcing the union, Colter had tried to be clear that his beef was primarily with the NCAA, not with Northwestern. But only by taking on Northwestern could he take on the NCAA, which created a more ambiguous situation. Northwestern lawyer Anna Wermuth noted that Fitzgerald had created a Leadership Council to give players some voice in team rules. Colter countered by saying that Fitzgerald retained 51% of the power. "We get an input," Colter said, "but at the end of the day he's the boss man."

Wermuth also brought up Colter's ankle to illustrate how Northwestern took care of players after graduation. "So they did say they would reimburse you for the MRI?" Wermuth asked.

"After they denied me," Colter interjected. "But I mean there shouldn't be any gray area. I gave—I sacrificed my body for four years. They sold my jersey in the stores, and they should protect me as far as medical coverage."

A columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* described Colter as "slinging mud" and "belligerently grandstanding." Alumni and former teammates wanted to know why he was killing the program. An assistant coach told Colter he couldn't believe the quarterback had referred to Fitzgerald as *boss man*. The criticism, Colter said, was fierce: *You don't deserve to get paid; you signed up for this, you piece of crap*. "I felt like I had burned all these bridges with Northwestern," he says, "after I dedicated so much of my life there."

Colter's testimony changed the way some current players viewed the union push. Some questioned why he had publicly thrown Fitzgerald under the bus. Some felt that Colter, focused on the NFL, had less invested in Northwestern than they did. They were left to fight his battle, and they didn't like seeing their school under fire.

Underlying some of the criticism of Colter was the belief by the school and many of its alumni that Northwestern was the wrong place to highlight the pitfalls of college sports. In many ways that was true. It had a graduation rate of 97%, the highest in college football's top division, and a history of providing some medical coverage even after an athlete's playing days had ended. As soon as the NCAA allowed schools to guarantee four-year scholarships, Northwestern was one of the few to do so immediately. In truth, the university treated its players about as well as any school did—and as well as NCAA rules allowed. This was part of Northwestern's defense. Colter's concerns were NCAA issues, the school's lawyers argued. Northwestern couldn't distribute cost-of-attendance stipends, for example, without the association's approval.

Northwestern called other players to testify, and each presented compelling evidence that the university valued schoolwork. But none refuted Colter's accounting of the hours or the coaches' control. Then came Fitzgerald. "We take great pride in developing our young men to be the best they possibly can be in everything that they choose to do—athletically, academically, socially," he said. But Kohlman got him to concede that the players can spend 24 hours on football on a Friday and Saturday when they travel to away games. He acknowledged that he set team rules too. In an interview the year before, Fitzgerald had called being a student-athlete "a full-time job."

"We won the case with Fitzgerald on the stand," Kohlman says.

A MONTH LATER, Peter Sung Ohr's decision rattled college sports. The NLRB regional director eviscerated the NCAA's bedrock principle that college athletes were first and foremost students. "The players spend 50 to 60 hours per week on their football duties during a one-month training camp prior to the start of the academic year and an additional 40 to 50 hours per week on those duties during the three- or four-month football season," the ruling said. "Not only is this more hours than many undisputed full-time employees work at their jobs, it is also many more hours than the players spend on their studies." Ohr also noted that Northwestern football reported \$235 million in revenue from 2003 to '12.

"Is this real? Did we really win?" Colter shouted when Huma phoned him with the news.

"Then things really got crazy," Colter says.

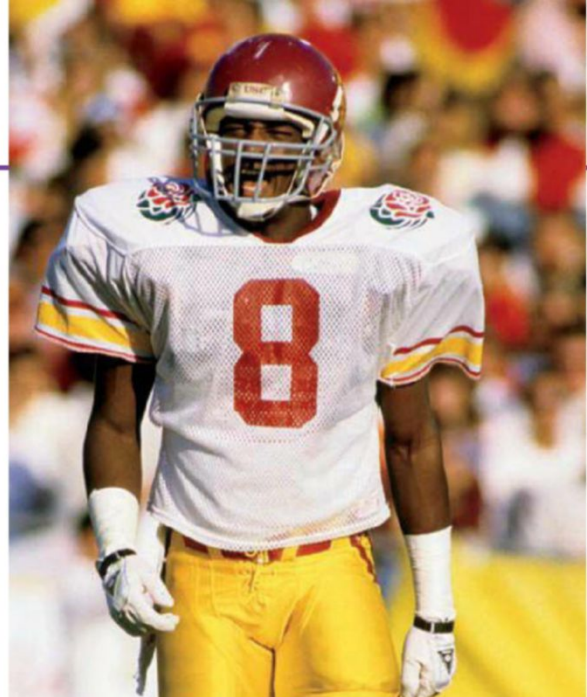
Panic swept athletic departments. Sports officials outdid each other with doomsday scenarios. NCAA president Mark Emmert called a union "grossly inappropriate." Former Northwestern president Henry Bienen proclaimed that the university might leave Division I. "What happens if school A or school B becomes a union school?" Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany asked *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Rick Telander. "You don't know. I have no idea! Places where there are unions, places with no unions, no NCAA, no NCAA rules? I think you would have chaos."

Northwestern immediately appealed Ohr's decision to the full NLRB in Washington, and a group of congressional Republicans submitted a supporting amicus brief. A U.S. House of Representatives committee called a hearing in May that brought Stanford athletic director Bernard Muir and Baylor president Kenneth Starr (yes, the former Bill Clinton antagonist) to D.C. to lament the unionization drive. If Stanford players unionized, Muir said, the school would look for a new way to run its sports programs.

The Northwestern football team wasn't even unionized yet. An election was scheduled for April. Seventy-six players were eligible to vote, and the union had to be certified by a majority of the ballots cast. Northwestern, like any employer fighting a union drive, set out to beat the vote.

Fitzgerald announced that he had told the players to vote down the union. "I just do not believe we need a third party between our players and our coaches, staff and administrators," he said at a spring practice. This became the theme of the school's campaign—one that heaped immense pressure on the shoulders of 18- to 22-year-olds. When the players returned to practice after Ohr's ruling, they were given new iPads and a trip to a bowling alley. (Northwestern counters that the iPads were ordered in December 2013, and that the team organized regular outings, including several to Chicago Blackhawks games.) Position coaches talked to players. Parents were emailed.

The team solicited anonymous questions from players, parents and staff



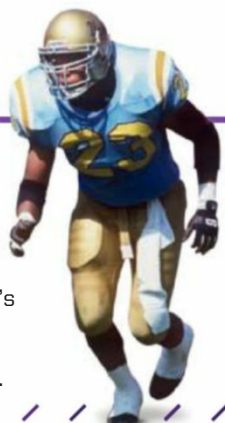
and compiled a 21-page Q&A. The message was that a union could result in fewer benefits. Players were allowed, for instance, to travel home for emergencies, but that privilege could become contingent on collective bargaining.

To be sure, there were pitfalls to the union approach. A national union representing college athletes was far-fetched, given the different labor laws in each state and the fact that college teams included both private and public institutions. The impact on Title IX and what an employee model meant for workers' compensation, unemployment benefits and potential salaries were unclear as well.

There were also things a school could do within the constraints of the NCAA, whether the players unionized or not. Northwestern could cut the number of full-contact practices it held, and it could guarantee long-term health care to injured players. If Northwestern's football players could bargain for those things—benefits that didn't violate NCAA rules—then, the theory went, other schools would follow suit to keep up in recruiting.

These questions, though, were mostly pushed aside as the school threw its weight behind defeating the union push. Dan Persa, the former Wildcats quarterback, warned players that Fitzgerald might leave if they voted for the union. Players heard other ominous warnings—that donations could dry up, or a new \$225 million athletic center could be scrapped. Players got calls from alums telling them that casting their lot with Colter could hurt their job prospects after graduation; the Northwestern alumni network would desert them.

Colter, meanwhile, held his pro day at Northwestern to work out for NFL scouts in early April, only to find that some of his former coaches wouldn't speak to him.



CAUTIONARY TALES

An injury to Cleveland (left) at USC raised Kain's awareness; Huma was driven by the plight of Edwards (right) at UCLA.

THE NLRB DID NOT DISPUTE THAT PLAYERS WORKED LONG HOURS & WERE PAID FOR IT.

(A Northwestern spokesman replied that the school arranged the workout specially for Colter, because he had been injured.) As Colter was vilified, however, certain alumni grew concerned that the university was turning its back on its former star quarterback and that the players were being bullied into voting down the union. Led by Kevin Brown and Alex Moyer, who both played for Northwestern in the 1980s, a small group went to see Fitzgerald. According to Brown, Fitzgerald was also concerned about the pressure on the players. "Players were torn because they didn't want to disappoint their coach," Brown says. "[But] a coach represents the university's interests more than the players' interests. We didn't care one way or the other if they formed a union, but they should be allowed the freedom to exert their rights."

Brown and Moyer called a meeting at a community center in Evanston the week before the vote to voice their concerns. Around 60 former players, going back to teams from the 1970s, were there, as well as a handful of current players. "I'm worried Kain is becoming a pariah," Moyer said to the group.

"He chose to be a pariah," jeered an alum.

As the vote neared, Colter and Huma returned to Evanston and called a meeting of players at a hotel near campus. Some players didn't like the way their new iPads had been portrayed as bribes; they also wanted to know why other schools hadn't followed their lead. Colter and Huma had said they were talking to players at other, unnamed universities, but Northwestern was alone in the spotlight.

Colter felt as if his former teammates no longer trusted him. Northwestern's campaign had worked. He polled the room, and it was clear the school would

win the election. Even some of his closest confidants from the previous months weren't with him anymore. Players now questioned his motives: Why had he given them only a day to sign the cards? He also noticed that most African-American players supported the union and most white players opposed it. "There was a huge divide," Colter says. "The majority of the team was split along racial lines. It was just ugly."

The players voted on a mild April afternoon. Traveon Henry, a safety, said afterward, "It's a relief to have it off our plate."

ON AUG. 17, 2015, the NLRB in Washington finally issued its ruling on Northwestern's appeal. The five members unanimously agreed not to exert the board's jurisdiction over whether Northwestern's football players were university employees. Perhaps fearful of the consequences of upending the governance of college sports, the board punted. The union ballots would never be counted. The status quo reigned.

What puzzled some observers was that the board did not dispute the fundamental facts of the case—that the players worked long hours under the direction of their coaches and were paid for it. The board even acknowledged the precariousness of the current system. "Whether such individuals meet the Board's test for employee status is a question that does not have an obvious answer," a footnote in the decision read.

Colter wrote an email to his former teammates applauding them for having stood up and pointing out the myriad changes already under way around the NCAA. "We played a role in that," Colter says. "Those guys should be proud."

Among those changes: In May 2014, shortly before the trial of the class-action lawsuit brought by former UCLA basketball player Ed O'Bannon against the NCAA for licensing his image to video games without compensating him, two companies that had been codefendants with the NCAA—EA Sports and CLC (Collegiate Licensing Company)—settled. EA Sports and CLC agreed to pay \$40 million to a class of players who had been on its rosters in video games going back to '03, the first time any commercial entity had agreed to pay college athletes. In the O'Bannon case itself, Judge Claudia Wilken ruled that the NCAA had violated antitrust law. Schools couldn't block players from receiving broadcast and video-game money; there was a clear market for their names and images.

Weeks before the trial, the Pac-12 presidents published a 10-point reform plan that included full cost of attendance, lifetime education trusts and improved medical insurance for players. The Big Ten commissioner, Jim Delany, testified during the trial, and days later the conference's presidents issued a similar open letter. South Carolina, Indiana and Southern Cal unilaterally announced that they would begin handing out four-year athletic scholarships. And the NCAA abandoned its longtime release form for the use of players' names, images and likenesses. (Schools and conferences now issue the form.) For practically the first time in NCAA history, colleges were tripping over themselves to do better by their athletes.

On the opening weekend of the 2015 season, Colter watched his Wildcats upset a ranked Stanford team and cheered his heart out. He hopes one day to sit down with Fitzgerald. "I don't think he totally disagrees with everything we did," Colter says. "If we could talk, we would agree on a lot and disagree on a few things. I'd love for the relationship between Northwestern and me to be fixed, and the good thing is, time heals all wounds." □



Fame Can Be A Kick

→ BY HOLLY HOLM

IN THE SUMMER of 2012, I won a welterweight world title belt in women's boxing. The fight was held in front of 3,000 fans at the Route 66 Casino, in my hometown of Albuquerque. It was a great night. I had family and friends there and got a lot of texts congratulating me. Afterward, my husband, Jeff, and I got into our truck and drove home. The next day there was a story in the local newspaper.

Last November, I fought for the UFC's women's bantamweight championship. In front of almost 60,000 fans in Etihad Stadium in Melbourne, Australia, and a ton of eyeballs around the world, I knocked out Ronda Rousey in the second round. I remember that after the fight, as I was being driven to the press conference in a golf cart, I was wondering whether my life would change. Before flying back home I spent the next two days with friends and family in this faraway Australian city, having team meals, taking in the moment and not letting the time pass me by. Looking back, I see that was the calm before the storm. I was hanging on to a last bit of "normal" before the fame train took off.

After I came back to the U.S., I spent less than a day at home before I was off to New York City for all sorts of media appearances—including, yes, an interview and photo shoot for *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*. There were early-morning wake-up calls and late-night TV shows. I was a guest on Seth Meyers's show. I always loved Kelly and Michael, and then there I was, on their show. I went to Los Angeles. I went to Las Vegas. If I wasn't flying, I was in the back of a town car. I picked up more than 100,000 followers on Twitter. When I finally had some time at home, the city of Albuquerque threw me a parade.

I want to be clear: I'm not complaining or looking for sympathy. This has been an amazing and humbling experience. You work hard for something, and while you haven't been doing it to get recognized, it's nice when



One reason
I was so
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UFC fight:
to get back
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and
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and doing
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me here.



**Do you want
to see a
Holm-Rousey
rematch?**

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you are. I've had so many incredible experiences these last few months. I met John Elway, someone I've always admired, and that was an honor. Same for Derek Jeter. Jamie Foxx. Floyd Mayweather.

But it's an adjustment. Your time gets sliced and diced. You want to sign every autograph and take every photo, but something has to give. I'm 34 and married and have a lot of people around me who have been with me a long time, before any of this. It must be so hard to deal with fame when you're younger or you don't have that support base.

People say it all the time, but after the last few months it really is easy for me to see how celebrity can change a person. It's helpful to remind yourself why you got this fame. It wasn't for your ability to do an interview or pose for photos. You had an underlying talent. In my case, it was because of the way I competed in mixed martial arts.

That's one reason I was so eager to get another fight from the UFC. I wanted to get back to training and competing and doing what got me here. When I was given an opponent, Miesha Tate, and a fight date to look forward to, it was like, Yes, I can focus on what I do best.

I'm back in training. Back to driving myself and not being driven. Back to sleeping in my own bed. And I'm dialing back the interviews and appearances. From game-planning for a different kind of opponent—Ronda has a judo background, Miesha is more of a wrestler—to altitude training, I'm going to do everything I can to be prepared for the fight. If, afterward, there's another victory tour, that will be fine with me. □

Holly Holm, who knocked out Ronda Rousey in her last fight (left), defends her belt against Miesha Tate at UFC 197, on March 5 in Las Vegas.



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